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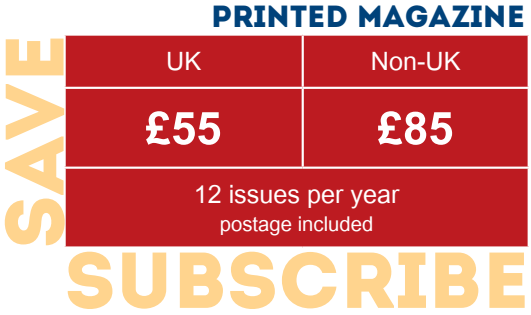

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The Coronavirus Candidates and the coronavirus world

Wherever you turn, wherever you go, it seems that coronavirus is the only topic. Even the British Prime Minister could not escape Covid-19 and is (at the time of writing this article) in hospital. In sports, the Olympic Games fell victim and were moved to 2021 (for now). Sadly, even the chess world could not save itself from it. Although the global chess organization tried desperately, even the 2020 Candidates, one of the most important events of the year, had to be stopped half-way through. In the meantime, news of cancellations of many chess events was announced. Furthermore, even the building of the venue in Dubai - where the match for the title of the World Champion was supposed to take place -was cancelled!

The main focus of the chess community these days has been on Yekaterinburg where the first part of the 2020 Candidates was played. Following the announcement of the government of the Russian Federation about suspending all flights to and from the country as of March 27, the International Chess Federation (FIDE) has decided to halt this Tournament unfinished.

The event that brought together eight elite world players and was watched by millions online around the globe (according to FIDE) had to stop. If this is worth anything, chess was the last sport to fall - the sport which stood the longest against coronavirus and its unprecedented global impact on everything.

As we enter a period of spending weeks if not months in lockdown, some think that this might be a chance for chess to become more popular, as millions are now tied to their homes. Whether this will mean people tuning in to play chess online or going into their cellars or attics to pick up the dusty chess set, it will be great - firstly for those who do take up chess, and, secondly, for us in the chess community.

Getting back to the 2020 Candidates which stopped half-way - with seven out of 14 rounds played - there is a lot of debate about it. There are many people arguing over whether or not the tournament should have taken place, given the global situation which was developing. The good thing is that nobody got sick during the event while it lasted and everyone got home safely. Interestingly, the last person to return from the Candidates was the Chief Arbiter, Nebojsa Baralic, who arrived in his home country Serbia on 4th April, having waited for over a week for a flight to pick him up and take him home.

We here at the British Chess Magazine won't judge FIDE or anyone for their opinions and decisions. Instead, in this issue we are publishing two views: one, which appeared on the website of FIDE, offering a round-up of the event; and another, published by BCM's Aleksandar Colovic on his blog. Both offer views which broadly cover both sides of the debate about the 2020 Candidates which will probably be remembered for everything other than chess.

Finally, we hope you are well and safe wherever you are. We will do our best to continue to provide BCM and fill it with more interesting content even in these uncertain and unusual times. If you have any suggestions, comments, stories, or would like to share with us how your chess is going now under lockdown, please let us know at: editor@britishchessmagazine.co.uk.

BCM Editors

AFTER THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE 2020 CANDIDATES

NOW WHAT?

By GM Aleksandar Colovic
www.alexcolovic.com

The Candidates unfortunately did not finish. Or is it perhaps fortunately?

In this post I will give my thoughts on the whole mess that started before the tournament and is still ongoing after its postponement.

In a world that was rapidly shutting down FIDE decided to go ahead with its flagship tournament. It ran against common sense yet they insisted. The mantra they kept repeating "it's only a 8-player tournament" was simply not true, if not insulting - it implied that there were only 8 people that needed to be protected. What about all the other persons who were present and working there to make sure the tournament was running "smoothly"?

Why did FIDE insist against common sense and strong opinions from the public and recommendations of institutions like the WHO? Why it didn't mind that one of the participants withdrew and another publicly stated that the tournament should not have taken place? They said they couldn't postpone the tournament "legally or practically." Again, this turned out to be untrue, especially after the Russian government issued a statement to stop all international events from the 16 of March and FIDE's reply that that didn't apply to the Candidates because they started on the 15 of March (which was arrivals day, with Round 1 on the 17 of March).

I think there are two main reasons for FIDE's behaviour: financial and moral.

The financial reason is that FIDE needs the money from the World Championship cycle. The cherry on the cake is the World Championship match. FIDE announced that they agreed to hold the match in Dubai in December. But you need two players for a match and one of them is the winner of the Candidates. No Candidates, no match. No match, no money.

The moral reason is "we promised, we delivered". Even some heroics is implied, "we delivered against all odds." Fair enough, they kept their word (if we accept that 50% of the tournament is indeed "delivered"), but to insist in times of a black swan force majeure where some flexibility would have been much more prudent would have sent a much better message to the public. And would have done wonders for their reputation.

There are world-class Grandmasters and very intelligent people in FIDE and I don't think that they failed to "calculate" the development of the world's events that led to what we are seeing now. They were running out of time, so they took their chance with the event, pushed through and hoped they get at least to half of the tournament. The risk paid off.

With half the tournament played FIDE now is safe. They insist that the Candidates will be resumed but I don't think that matters anymore. If it's impossible to resume, due to the world situation or any other reason, they can still proclaim a winner from these 7 rounds (Vachier) and the match is on. Of course, there will be outrage, but legally everything will be right: the tournament results are valid as long as 50% of the games have been played. They will have delivered the cycle and the match.

(I don't want to go into discussing the implications when a tournament is split in 2 parts with unknown time between them, disrupting the whole dynamics of the tournament. It's a different story altogether, again not ending well for FIDE).

If what I say above is true, then it's evident that all this has been about FIDE's interests and nothing else. I for one love to see orderly World Championship cycle and calendar of events, but if the Olympiad, with its decades of history could be postponed, I don't see why the World Championship cycle could not. The explanation that at the time the tournament started the situation was different is pure demagogy. It's the same as a Grandmaster evaluating a position without calculating a few moves ahead.

The situation with the players is also an interesting one. There were two, Radjabov and Wang Hao, who expressed their concerns before the event - Radjabov even acted upon them and withdrew. There was Grischuk who openly said during the tournament that he didn't want to be there and play, the atmosphere being "sick". There was Caruana who in an interview said that it's impossible not to follow what's happening in the world. There was Nepomniachtchi who really got sick (though not from corona). There was Ding Liren who played awfully and didn't say a word about his quarantines. There was Alekseenko, who is sponsored by a Russian company and couldn't say anything. And there were Giri and Vachier who basically said they didn't care and were concentrated solely on themselves. It's interesting that even Magnus Carlsen expressed a similar view - the world may be falling apart, but you're there to play and win, so do that. Get rich or die trying I suppose.

This is nothing new in the chess world. Every man for himself. I wonder what would have happened had they coordinated before the tournament. Perhaps finally we would have had "power to the players"? But we will never have that.

Radjabov's decision to withdraw was justified in hindsight, but that is a different can of worms with no solution that is acceptable for all. I wonder how FIDE and the public will handle that one.

Chess, as the whole world, is now on hold. There will be no Olympiad this year and it's hard to say whether there will be anything really. Perhaps the World Championship match in December? Let's see. As the Chinese would say, we are truly living in interesting times.

Published on www.alexcolovic.com on 30th March

AFTER THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE 2020 CANDIDATES

Chess without spectators: The empty playing hall

FIDE's view:

We are witnessing the creation of a new "normal", where both chess and life will be completely different

Photo: FIDE Official, Maria Emelianova / Lennart Ootes

The FIDE 2020 Candidates Tournament was brought to a halt after the decision of the Russian authorities to stop all international flights as of March 27. By that point, half of the tournament had been played (seven out of 14 rounds) and the chess community and the world, in general, had had a chance to enjoy spectacular games, a welcome distraction from the rolling news about the coronavirus.

The 'elbow' shake

Explaining the decision to halt the Candidates, FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich said that the stopping of international flights to/from Russia would have "put too much pressure on the players and participants in terms of how and when they will be able to return home". He added that FIDE did "everything to ensure the safe and secure return of everyone to their homes". On the morning of the announcement by the Russian government, and following the decision to stop the event, FIDE immediately sorted out travel for both players and staff, by purchasing tickets and organizing a charter flight to ensure everyone's speedy and safe return home.

The Candidates tournament is one of the most important chess events of the year - to both the players and the chess community - and is directly connected to the match for the title of World Champion. This year's event has a prize fund of 500,000 euros, which is the biggest ever for a Candidates tournament. FIDE was committed to doing everything in its power to ensure that play went ahead, providing maximum safety and security for all involved, which was maintained for the duration of the event. It should also be noted that every decision about the event was made in consultation and agreement with the players who took part.

There have been questions as to whether the decision to go ahead with the event in the first place was right or wrong. FIDE maintains that when the decision was made to go ahead, it was done so taking into consideration the situation in Russia at the time (there were only a small number of cases and everything was done in coordination with the Russian authorities) and following discussions with the players. FIDE also put in place health & safety measures to ensure that the players, arbiters and the entire on-site staff had all the necessary protection. This included two daily check-ups with doctors, tests for

coronavirus (two were carried out for the duration of the event, at the beginning and at the end, and all came back as negative), sanitizers and masks, as well as banning spectators and maintaining social distancing for all involved. It should also be noted that the constant health monitoring and high level of protection provided to everyone involved was much more stringent than anything currently available to the majority of people around the world on a daily basis.

As World Champion Magnus Carlsen noted on his comments to Chess24, "having completed seven rounds has some merit - at least we tried, which I think in these days should not be discounted as nothing! I feel as though obviously this situation is chaotic and all those people who called for the tournament to be postponed from the start are going to say, 'I told you so' at this point, but I do feel as though they tried what they could and now it's just not possible so they have to get the players out safely."

It is right to argue that the tournament took place under difficult, even unprecedented, circumstances. However, we are witnessing the creation of a new "normal", where not just playing chess, but life in general will be completely different. How we do things in the future, in whichever field that may be, is very likely going to be significantly different from what it was before the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. As Vishy Anand put it, "we are on the uncharted territory". Bearing this in mind, FIDE's decision to go ahead with the event was done by trying to minimize these disruptive circumstances. It was guided by having the best interests of chess at heart and in an attempt to help provide the chess audience and the public in general with a tournament that would lift everyone's spirits during these troubled times, while also maintaining the health and safety of all involved.

For the duration of the first part of the event, interest in chess has risen globally. The live stream and commentary of the 2020 Candidates have attracted a viewership of several million people around the world. Top-class players (including the current World Champion) took part in daily shows to comment on the games. Overall, chess portals with live commentary saw a strong increase in viewership.

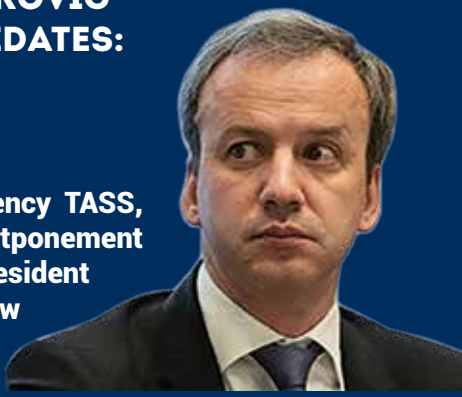
Reports about the 2020 Candidates appeared on prominent pages in media outlets around the world (Reuters, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, to name a few), giving chess attention which has not been seen for years. While concerns about the decision to continue with the event were pointed out (FIDE acknowledged them and always faced them head-on), the chess community was praised for its endeavor to have the only major sporting event in the world going ahead for as long as possible.

In chess terms, the seven rounds played at the 2020 Candidates produced some of the best examples of chess play and chess spirit ever seen. In the frist part, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ian Nepomniachtchi gave the best performances but other participants showed a high level of preparation and sophistication in their play. All 28 games played in the first seven rounds provided excitement and novelty, pushing the overall quality of chess currently played in the world to a higher level.

Following the agreement between FIDE and players before the event, with regards to the current global developments, the tournament has now stopped and will continue at a later stage when circumstances allow. In the meantime, FIDE has said that it remains committed to ensuring that the chess community continues to function during this period. The international chess body will use this time to find new ways and ideas to connect the chess community and to reach out to people everywhere, stepping up online activities and finding new ways of keeping people connected.

FIDE PRESIDENT ARKADY DVORKOVIC ON THE YEKATERINBURG CANDIDATES:

We did our best



In an interview for the Russian news agency TASS, immediately after announcing the postponement of the Candidates tournament, FIDE President explained his decision. Here is the interview in full, published on 26th March 2020:

Q: Has FIDE discussed this decision to stop the event with the players, what do they think?

Arkady Dvorkovich: We have been in touch with the players every day during the event and we were weighing all the risks all the time. FIDE believes that this is the best course of action under these circumstances. We remain committed to popularising chess and raising the spirits at this grave time, but we have always said that people's lives and health are a priority for us.

Q: Air traffic with other countries has been suspended by Russia. Won't it be a problem for all the chess players to go home?

Arkady Dvorkovich: This unique situation transpired suddenly. We are doing everything we can to provide the necessary support to everyone and get them home safely. Tickets for all the players and most other people involved in the tournament have already been purchased, and we are organizing all necessary logistics. FIDE is organizing and paying for all the travel costs and is working closely with everyone to ensure all is done safely and efficiently.

Q: In your opinion, will the tournament be finished this year or when? Will Yekaterinburg remain the host?

Arkady Dvorkovich: We will do our best for everything to be sorted out as soon as possible, following regulations and protecting the safety and interests of all involved. We remain confident that the event will be completed this year, in cooperation with our main partner – SIMA-land. The issue of exact dates and locations will be resolved in the near future, as soon as the global situation stabilizes.

Q: Why did you decide to start the tournament when the virus was already spreading strongly around the world?

Arkady Dvorkovich: This is a very important event for the players and the chess world. The situation in Russia was different at the beginning. We looked at different trajectories of the situation, including potential cancellations. At the same time, in terms of the medical safety measures, the Candidates Tournament was well prepared.

All the players, arbiters and staff had medical checkups twice a day, tests for the detection of COVID-19 have been done and all came back as negative. Also, the spectators have been banned from the venue and the interaction between the players and the media has been put to a minimum.

However, we concluded that the flight ban announced this morning would put too much pressure on the players and participants in terms of how and when they will be able to return home. Unfortunately, the situation with the pandemic is developing in the most negative scenario. We, therefore, believe that our decision to suspend the Tournament at this moment was correct. Again, we are doing everything we can to ensure the safe and secure return of everyone to their homes.

Q: Is there a significant financial loss for FIDE due to the transfer?

Arkady Dvorkovich: Our priority was and remains to make sure that everyone involved is safe and returns to their home. Losses are minimal and definitely not a factor in making this decision. We have a mutual understanding with our partners and sponsors, and we are grateful for their support.

Q: In general, what is your view of what is happening in the spirting word and how things will develop?

Arkady Dvorkovich: It is difficult to give estimates - no one knows for how long the acute phase of the crisis caused by the coronavirus will last. There are different opinions about how long the events should be postponed – 2-3 months or six months to a year. I believe that with the joint efforts of all countries and tough measures, we will be able to defeat the pandemic. Of course, it will be a slightly different world afterwards, but we will be stronger.

The coming period will be used by FIDE to search for and find new ways and ideas, expand links between national federations, strengthen partnerships and share experiences. Nowadays we must use all the latest online formats to communicate with current and potential chess fans. We will, therefore, step up our online activities and do more to attract chess audiences to our online services and platforms through training, tournaments, and conferences.

These are challenging times, but we see this as an opportunity and want to do our best to help the chess community and promote the game.

Q: And an important question about the match for the title of World Champion. Is the match also being postponed?

Arkady Dvorkovich: The match for the chess crown is due to take place at the end of the year. There is no question of changing dates.

WHAT HAS THE FIRST PART OF THE
(MOST UNUSUAL EVER) CANDIDATES TOURNAMENT SHOWN?

UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN YEKATERINBURG

By GM Aleksandar Colovic / www.alexcolovic.com
Photo: FIDE Official, Maria Emelianova / Lennart Ootes

The most-awaited tournament of the year started as scheduled in Yekaterinburg, with the first round taking place on 17th of March. In normal circumstances, this would have been expected, but, as it happened, it was nothing short of incredulous.

FIDE's decision to hold the event in spite of the world shutting down due to coronavirus was controversial at best, with the tournament ending at the half-way stage with uncertainty when (and if!) it would continue. My view on this whole issue will be explained in a separate article, in this issue of BCM.

Turning our attention to the chess part, the seven rounds that were played contained a few surprising twists. I will give a brief analysis of all the players.

With 4.5 out of seven Vachier-Lagrave and Nepomniachtchi are in the lead, the only players who have more than a 50% score. They got there via different routes.

IAN NEPOMNIACHTCHI

Ian Nepomniachtchi was leading from the start. His play with the white pieces was excellent, beating both Chinese players in consecutive rounds. Coupled with the Round 1 win over Giri, where he ran into a deep novelty yet managed to practically refute it over the board, the Russian player firmly established himself as the favourite. Here is his fine technical win against Wang Hao.

Ian **Nepomniachtchi - Wang** Hao

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (5.4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 The Petroff is Wang Hao's mainstay defence against 1.e4 when playing against elite opposition.

3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 Nepomniachtchi has also successfully played 5.♘c3.

5...d5 6.♗d3 ♗f5 In the past Wang Hao's usual choice in the Petroff was 6...♗d6, as against Caruana in the World Swiss. The so-called Chinese variation is yet another tough variation for White in the Petroff, so it should not have come as a surprise for Nepomniachtchi.

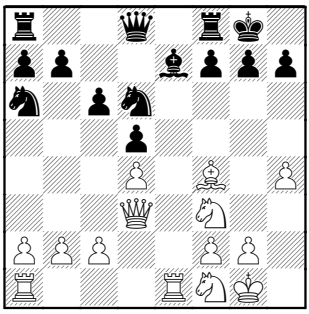
7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♖e1 The main move; the alternatives are 8.c4, 8.♘e5 and 8.♘c3.

8...0-0 9.♘bd2 If White doesn't want to enter the established theoretical lines after 9.c4, which are considered fine for Black; he has the option of 9.♘c3 as well.

9...♘d6 10.♘f1 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 c6 12.♗f4 The alternative is 13.♘g3. In this symmetrical structure, which is the same as in the Anti-Berlin line 5.♖e1, White's slight, but nagging initiative is not easy to extinguish.

12...♘a6 Black's idea is to transfer this knight via c7 to e6.

13.h4



Here's White's novelty. Previously White tried to double on the e-file or play 13.♘g3 or 13.♘e3. Nowadays nobody is surprised by a novelty that involves moving the h-pawn, such was the impact of AlphaZero's methods. The idea is two-fold: either to put a piece on g5, or to push the h-pawn further, all the way to h6, in order to obtain a long-term advantage against the weak king on g8.

13...♘c7 Black continues with his plan.

13...h6 would have prevented White's next, but would have allowed an annoying knight on f5 after 14.♘g3 ♘c7 15.♗xd6! ♗xd6 16.♘f5 as the pawn on h6 makes it difficult to chase it away by ...g6.

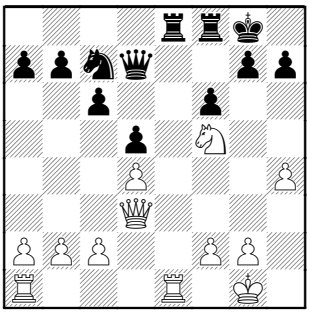
14.♘g5 Forcing Black to take the knight if he wants to complete the knight transfer to e6.

14...♗xg5 15.♗xg5 f6 Another forced move, as otherwise White could have played ♖e7 on the next move.

16.♗f4 ♕d7 Black liberates the eighth rank and plans to exchange the rooks on the e-file.

17.♘g3 White aims to plant a knight on f5.

17...♖ae8 18.♗xd6 ♕xd6 19.♘f5 ♕d7



Visually, White still has a somewhat preferable position, but Black has no weaknesses and further simplifications are unavoidable.

20.♕h3 Threatening ♘h6. Ever since the novelty 13.h4 White's play has been very concrete, creating threats with every move. Black is of course solid, but parrying threats move after move creates psychological pressure on the defender.

20...♔h8 Black keeps the e-file open in order to exchange the rooks. Analysis of the other two options shows that there was no easy way to equality for Black.

20...♖e6 is logical, to double on the e-file, but after 21.h5 ♖fe8 *(21...g6 is better, though after 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.♖e3 White keeps the pressure.)* 22.♖e3!, with the idea of ♖g3, Black is in trouble.; After 20...♘e6 21.h5, with ideas like ♕g4, h6, ♖e3 etc., it is clear that Black is feeling uncomfortable.

21.h5 ♖xe1+ This is principled: Black exchanges more pieces.

21...♘b5 was a decent alternative as the knight on f5 is very active, so exchanging it would definitely constitute progress for Black. Still, after 22.a4 ♘d6 23.♘xd6 ♕xd6 24.h6, White manages to transform the advantage, now that of a better king. Black continues to have good drawing chances here, but the fact that White always manages to pose problems and keep the game going speaks of the continuous problems Black faces.

22.♖xe1 ♖e8 23.♖xe8+ ♘xe8 Black cannot take over the e-file, but this creates the threat of ...♘d6.

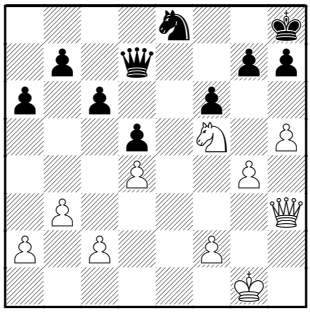
23...♕xe8? 24.♘d6 loses material as the pawn on b7 hangs.

24.g4 The engines prefer 24.$f1 and still give White some advantage. The game move looks natural, defending the knight on f5 and liberating the queen to move, but it also closes the h3-c8 diagonal so there are no more tricks based on ♘h6+.

24...a6 Now the pawn on a7 will not hang.

Black cannot immediately exchange the knights by 24...♘d6 in view of 25.♕a3, when Black loses the knight; 24...♔g8 was a decent alternative, bringing the king closer to the centre, eliminating back-rank mates and preparing ...♘d6.

25.b3



The only way to continue the game is to push c4 - there is no other way to create tension on the position.

25...♕e6 Taking the open file and finally forcing the knight away from the dominant position. After patient defence Black has managed to equalise, but the game goes on.

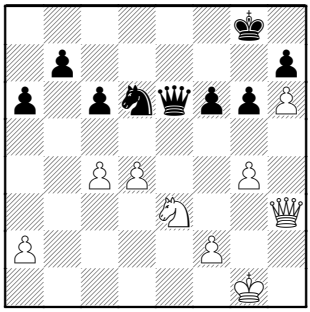
26.♘e3 ♘d6 The move 26...♔g8 was possible and it would have been more practical to play it either now or on one of the next moves, to eliminate the only problematic feature of Black's position - the weak back rank.

27.h6 Apart from the active possibility in the centre with c4, White creates problems for the black king. Objectively these should be dealt with relatively easily.

27...g6 28.c4 Following the plan to continue to push forward and setting up a cute trap at the same time.

28...dxc4 The move 28...♔g8 was also possible.

29.bxc4 ♔g8



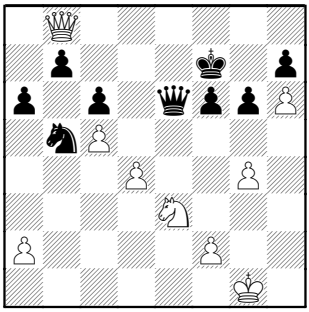
Finally getting the king out of the corner, but now White manages to penetrate with the queen.

29...♘xc4? 30.♘xc4 ♕xc4 31.♕h2! and suddenly Black is lost because of the weakness of the back rank. 31...♔g8 32.♕b8+ ♔f7 33.♕xb7+ ♔e6 34.♕xh7 the h-pawn decides the game.;

29...♕e4!? was a good alternative, the queen is active in the centre and after 30.c5 ♘e8 31.g5 f5 the game is sharp but Black is not worse; 29...♘f7 is the "cleanest" draw according to the engine, eyeing the pawn on h6. After 30.c5 ♕xa2 31.♕h2 ♕a1+ 32.♔g2 ♕xd4 33.♕b8+ ♕d8 34.♕xb7 ♕e8 Black has enough counterplay - he is a pawn up for now, h6 is hanging and there are threats against White's king after ...♕e4.

30.♕h2 After c5 the queen will come to b8 to continue to cause trouble. Objectively Black is still fine though.

30...♔f7 31.c5 ♘b5 32.♕b8



32...♕d7? The first mistake of the game and immediately the decisive one! The queen takes away the d7-square from the king, as we will see.

32...♘xd4 33.♕xb7+ ♕e7 34.♕xa6 ♕e4 is a curious position where Stockfish gives 0.00 at depth 45 while Leela Chess Zero (Lc0) gives White an advantage of +0.64. Who is right? If we continue along the lines suggested by both engines, Lc0 with

White and Stockfish with Black: 35.♕a7+ ♔e8 36.♕b8+ ♔f7 37.♕d6 f5 38.♕c7+ ♔f6 39.gxf5 ♘f3+ 40.♔f1 gxf5 41.♕g7+ ♔e6 42.♕h8 ♘e5 we come to a position where Stockfish is closer to the truth - Black should draw with perpetual. When forcing lines are dominating, Stockfish is more precise in the calculations, though Lc0 is good at finding deviations from Stockfish's forcing lines. This time, though, there weren't any promising ones;

32...♕e7 should draw for Black, the point being that if we follow the game continuation 33.♕h8 ♔e6 34.f4 *(34.♘c2 is better, keeping the game going.)* 34...♘xd4 35.♕g8+ Black has the move 35...♔d7

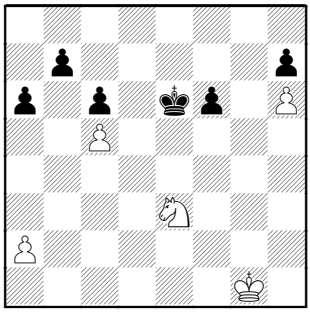
33.♕h8 ♔e6 34.f4! Threatening f5.

34...♘xd4 35.♕g8+ ♕f7 36.♕c8+ Gaining time on the clock.

36...♕d7 37.♕g8+ ♕f7 38.♕d8! Here it is, the winning move. The threat is ♕d6 mate

38...♕d7 38...♘b5 39.a4 wins the knight.

39.f5+! gxf5 40.gxf5+ ♘xf5 41.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 42.♘xf5 ♔e6 43.♘e3



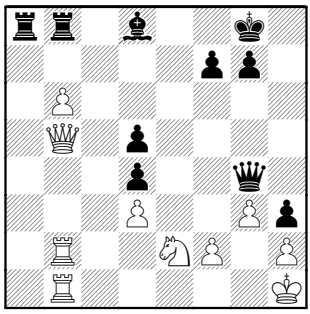
White has an extra piece with an elementary win.

1-0

Nepomniachtchi outplayed Ding Liren and from a human perspective his win was convincing, but the engine found a spot on the sun.

Ian **Nepomniachtchi - Ding** Liren

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (6.3)



White is winning, but he should take some care about his king.

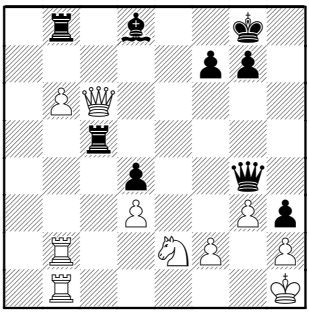
32.♕xd5? A natural move, centralising the queen and picking up the pawn, but one that surprisingly endangers the win!

32.♕e8+! was the way to go. White exchanges the b6-pawn for the f7-pawn but then after the simplifications Black's position will be in ruins: 32...♔h7 33.♕xf7 ♖xb6 34.♖xb6 ♗xb6 35.f3 ♕g5 36.♘f4 is technically winning for White - Black's pawns are too weak and the bishop cannot find a good spot.

32...♖a5 33.♕c6? Natural, keeping the queen on the diagonal and renewing the threat of ♕e8, but allowing an incredible saving resource.

33.f3! was the only way to keep winning chances. After 33...♖xd5 34.fxg4 ♖b7 35.♘g1 ♖d6 36.♘xh3 ♖bxb6 37.♖xb6 ♗xb6 38.♔g2 the pawn on d4 is weak and the black bishop is passive.

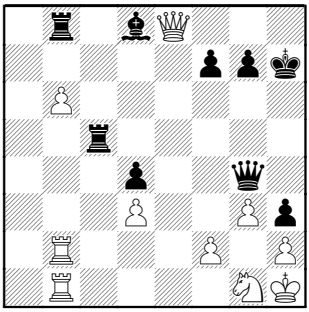
33...♖c5?



Missing a golden chance.

33...♖xb6! 34.♖xb6 ♕xe2! 35.♖b8 was what the players saw, missing 35...♖e5!! - an incredible move, giving away the bishop with check and remaining a rook down, but threatening ...♕e1. 36.♖xd8+ ♔h7 when White has nothing better than to return the extra rook 37.♖h8+ *(37.♖g1 ♕xf2 with the threat of ...♖e2 again forces White to return the rook by ♖h8.)* 37...♔xh8 38.♕c8+ ♔h7 39.♕xh3+ ♔g6 40.♕f1 defending both d3 and f2. 40...♕f3+ 41.♔g1 ♖e2 with a draw, as Black's activity easily compensates for the pawn deficit.

34.♕e8+ ♔h7 35.♘g1



Now the game is over - the knight defends the king safely and Black cannot deal with the b6-pawn and the attack on f7.

35...♖xb6 Desperation, but Black was lost anyway.

After 35...♕f5 36.b7 ♗c7 37.♕e4 after the exchange of queens the endgame is winning for White as the pawn on b7 is untouchable and the pawn on h3 will fall.

36.♕xd8 ♖xb2 37.♖xb2 ♖c1 38.♕h4+ ♕xh4 39.gxh4 ♖d1 40.f3 White wants to play ♖b4 forcing Black to take on d3, when White will take on h3 and untangle.

1-0

The result is great for Nepomniachtchi, but his games with Black showed that it could have been much worse. His surprise choice of the Winawer French (instead of his trusted Najdorf) as his main weapon against 1.e4 didn't inspire confidence, to say the least. He was close to being lost at one point against Alekseenko and lost deservedly against Vachier in the critical game from Round seven. He was also suffering in the Grunfeld against Caruana in Round four.

Nepomniachtchi wasn't among the favourites before the start of the tournament, but after the excellent start his confidence only increased and he played good chess to deserve the lead.

MAXIME VACHIER-LAGRAVE

Vachier–Lagrave only confirmed the old adage that the last-minute replacement does

well. The games showed that his lack of preparation, compared to the other players who were preparing for this tournament for months, didn't show at all. He stuck to his usual openings, 1.e4 with White plus Najdorf and Grunfeld with Black.

With White he won two good games against Ding Liren and Nepomniachtchi and was winning at one point in the Berlin endgame against Grischuk. With Black he showed excellent Najdorf preparation to draw without making a single move on his own against Alekseenko, while the usual 'French School of Suffering' (the phrase is by courtesy of Magnus Carlsen) was reserved for the Grunfeld, though he managed to hold draws against Giri and Wang Hao.

The critical game for Vachier was the Round seven win against Nepomniachtchi. This game wasn't only important for catching the Russian in the lead, but also to gain a superior tie-break: in case of equal points the first tie-break is the score of the mini-match between the players.

Maxime **Vachier Lagrave** – Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (7.2)

1.e4 e6 The French Defence was Nepomniachtchi's main opening against 1.e4, but his results with it were far from optimal. With one loss and one draw (where he risked losing) it is questionable whether it was an improvement over his trusted Najdorf.

2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 For more than several years now the Winawer has been less popular than 3...♘f6.

4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.h4 Vachier repeats Alekseenko's choice. In this way it was easier for him to prepare, narrowing down the possible variations he and his team had to analyse.

7...♕c7 8.h5 Alekseenko played the other main move in this position, 8.♘f3.

8...h6 Preventing h6.

With his convincing victory over Nepomniachtchi, MVL managed to tie the lead in the tournament

Taking the pawn after 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♕c3+ 10.♗d2 ♕xd4 11.♘f3 ♕e4+ 12.♗e2 gives White ample compensation as the open position favours the bishops, especially the dark-squared one.

9.♖b1 Not the most common move, but one scoring over 70% in White's favour! The idea is to remove the rook from a1 in case of a check from c3, thus liberating the queen to move.

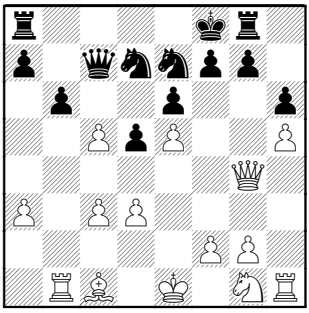
9...b6 10.♕g4 ♖g8 The alternative is the immediate 10...♔f8.

11.♗b5+ ♔f8 With this Black makes sure he exchanges the light-squared bishops.

11...♗d7 12.♗d3 is a typical idea, preventing the exchange of the bishops.

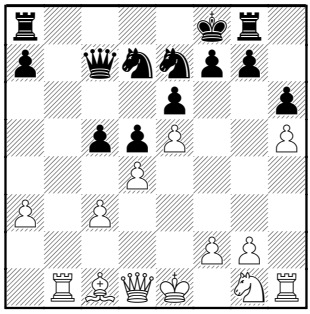
12.♗d3 ♗a6 13.dxc5 White opens up the game a little bit, as after the exchange of the bishops he will try to maximise the activity of the remaining bishop by putting it on the a3-f8 diagonal. With the exchange on c5 the pawn on c5 will be more vulnerable.

13...♗xd3 14.cxd3 ♘d7



14...♕xe5+ such a capture is usually not very good for Black as it opens the h2-b8 diagonal for the bishop. 15.♘e2 threatening ♗f4, so that Black cannot take on c5 since he will lose the knight on b8, 15...♘d7 16.cxb6 axb6 17.♕b4 is in White's favour as the disharmony of Black's pieces is telling; 14...bxc5 was possible, though after 15.♘f3 ♘d7 16.0-0! White manages to finish his development faster than in the game. The point is that Black cannot take on e5: 16...♘xe5? 17.♘xe5 ♕xe5 18.♗f4 ♕f5 19.♕g3 with ♗d6 to come is a typical French demolition.

15.d4 bxc5 16.♕d1

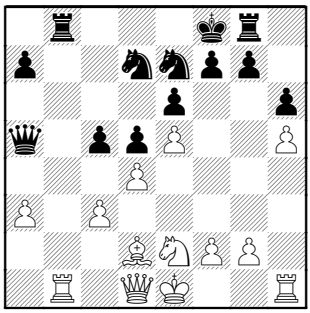


The queen had nothing to do on g4 any more so she is brought back home. White will now finish his development and he has two main ideas that can be combined: to create an attack after f4-f5 and to activate the bishop via a3 (after playing a4 first). Black on the other hand must solve the problem of the king in order to connect the rooks. If he manages that he will have a good position. However, the game shows that this was far from easy.

16...♕a5 Forcing the bishop to d2, thus making it more difficult to come to a3.

17.♗d2 As in many other lines of the French, White doesn't mind losing the a-pawn. He needs to finish developing fast and when the bishop is rerouted to a3 the passed a-pawn will be irrelevant.

17...♖b8 18.♘e2



Avoiding ...♕a6 preventing castling and keeping the path of the f-pawn open.

18...c4 This makes sense. Black wants to keep the position closed in order to untangle, perhaps by walking the king to d7 or c7, but, as the game showed, this doesn't come to fruition. But there was no easy route for Black to take here.

18...♖xb1 19.♕xb1 ♕a6 preventing castling. 20.a4! ♘c6 *(20...♕xa4 21.0-0* gives White strong initiative as he will bring the rook to the queenside.*)* 21.♕b5! the exchange of queens in principle is good for Black, but here it's very concrete as White manages to take advantage of Black's abandoned queenside: 21...♕xb5 22.axb5 ♘a5 23.0-0 ♘c4 24.♖a1!, a nice sacrifice proving the point. 24...♘xd2 25.♖xa7 ♔e7 26.dxc5 and the passed pawns decide;

18...♖b6 19.0-0 doesn't solve Black's problems either; for example, 19...♔e8 20.♕c2 ♔d8 21.c4! opens up the game in White's favour. At least with the game move Black makes sure this doesn't happen.

19.0-0 ♖b6 20.♕c2 White simply wants to take over the b-file using the extra rook while the one on g8 is stuck on the kingside. The queen also eyes the h7-square.

20...♖h8 Preventing ♕h7 ideas.

Black could have started the king walk immediately, but that doesn't help: 20...♔e8 21.a4 ♔d8 22.♖xb6 axb6 23.♗c1 ♔c7 24.♗a3 ♖e8 25.♖a1 and with ideas like ♗b4 and a5, coupled with ♕h7 or ♕c1-f4, Black will be over-stretched.

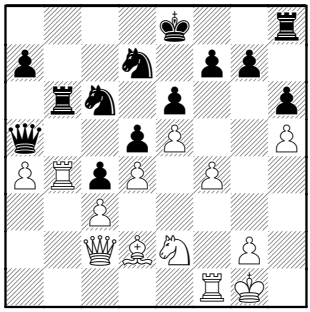
21.a4 White's play is natural; he intends the ♗c1-a3 manoeuvre.

21...♔e8 22.♖b4!? A creative decision.

22.♖xb6 was a simpler alternative; after 22...♘xb6 23.♖a1 with ♗c1-a3 White's advantage is obvious.

22...♘c6 22...♘b8, with the idea of ...♔d7, was probably better, though White is well on top here as well. 23.♖xb6 axb6 24.g4! with f4-f5 coming fast.

23.f4!



This was Vachier's idea - he plays on both flanks, immediately taking advantage of the absence of the knight from e7.

23...♘e7 This move implies that Nepomniachtchi overlooked White's 23rd move.

23...♘xb4? is suicidal. 24.cxb4 ♕a6 25.b5 ♕c8 26.f5 is winning for White: the bishop comes to b4 and then the decisive opening of the kingside will happen.

24.♖fb1 White is basically playing using the principles of two weaknesses - he probes on the queenside along the b-file and the manoeuvre ♗c1-a3 and keeps the

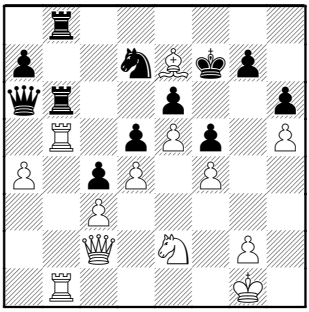
threat of f5 on the kingside. With the king stuck in the centre and the rook on h8 Black cannot hope to deal with both.

24...f5 A drastic attempt to get rid of the f5-threat, but unfortunately that doesn't stop it for ever...

25.♖b5 ♕a6 26.♗c1 White continues with the queenside progress; the bishop comes to a3, but he doesn't forget the kingside, as we will soon see.

26...♔f7 27.♗a3 ♖hb8 It appears that Black almost made it...

28.♗xe7!



But not quite!

28...♔xe7 29.g4! Finally opening the kingside and now even the simplifications cannot save Black.

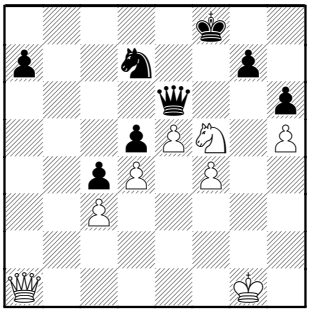
29...♖xb5 30.axb5 ♖xb5 31.gxf5 Black's kingside falls apart now.

31...♖xb1+ 32.♕xb1 exf5 33.♘g3! The knight joins the attack.

33...♕b6 Contesting the b-file and preventing ♕b4, but Black cannot stop the activation of White's queen.

34.♘xf5+ ♔f8 35.♕a1 Keeping an eye on the a-pawn and threatening ♕a3 if necessary. White can retreat with the knight to e3 or g3 and then push f5.

35...♕e6



An attempt at counterplay, which is easily controlled.

35...a5 36.♘e3 pinpoints the problem of the d5-pawn. 36...♔g8 *(Black cannot defend d5 with 36...♕b5 as White has 37.♕a3+ ♔g8 38.♕d6)* 37.♔f2, and White can take on d5 when he is ready. 37...♕b5 38.♕a3 and, with ♕e7 or ♕d6 coming, White wins.

36.♘g3 ♕g4 The counterplay isn't really threatening as the knight defends the king while the white queen collects the a7-pawn.

37.♔g2 ♕xf4 38.♕xa7 ♔e7 39.♕a3+ ♔d8 40.♕d6 The pawn on d5 is hanging and then e6 will be threatened. The game is over.

40...g5 41.hxg6 h5 42.g7

1-0

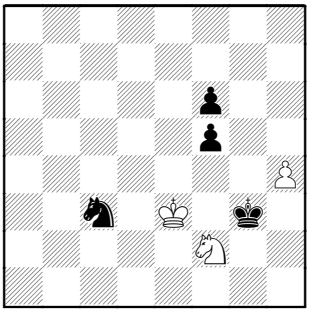
There are 4 players on 50%, with 3.5 out of 7: Giri, Grischuk, Caruana and Wang Hao.

ANISH GIRI

It must have been exhilarating for **Giri** to win a game in a Candidates tournament after 20 attempts. In Round 6 he won a drawn endgame against Alekseenko.

Kirill **Alekseenko** – Anish **Giri**

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (6.2)

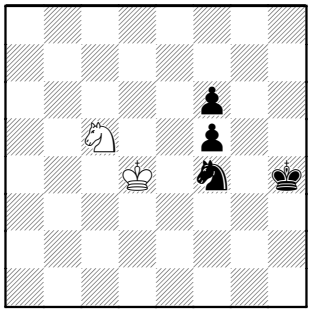


Alekseenko was one step from the draw, but with seconds left on the clock he makes the fatal mistake.

89.♘d3? Now the white king is pushed away.

Strange as it may seem, heeping the knight in the corner was the correct way to play. It was crucial to win a tempo by giving check as the black king must leave the perfect spot on g3. 89.♘h1+! ♔g4 still keeping control of f4, but now another annoying check follows. *(Going after the knight drops the pawns after 89...♔g2 90.♔f4 ♔xh1 91.♔xf5 ♘d5 92.♔e6; 89...♔xh4 90.♔f4 is similar. As we see, the key is the f4-square.)* 90.♘f2+ unless allowing a perpetual, the black king cannot remain on g3 or g4. 90...♔xh4 91.♔f4 ♘e4 92.♔xf5

89...♘d5+ 90.♔d4 ♘f4 91.♘c5 ♔xh4



White's coordination is gone and the rest is elementary.

92.♔e3 ♔g3 93.♘b3 ♘e6 94.♘d2 f4+ 95.♔e2 ♘g5 96.♔f1 f3 97.♔g1 f2+ 98.♔f1 f5

0-1

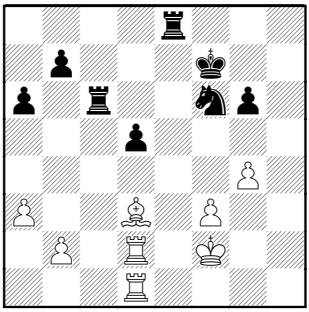
This was particularly liberating after starting horribly with a loss with White to Nepomniachtchi and wasting a very enterprising novelty in the process. Things could have gone seriously awry for him as he was also lost in Round 2 against Wang Hao, but after that scare Giri stabilised the situation and started playing well. He was pressing Vachier's Grunfeld and was winning against Caruana after employing a rare set-up against the Slav. He is definitely the happiest of the four players on 50%.

ALEXANDER GRISCHUK

Grischuk had a typical tournament, the typical element being his eternal time-troubles. Whenever I saw Grischuk spending 50 minutes or so on a single move I was reminded of Korchnoi's saying that no matter how much time you give to the time-trouble addict, eventually he will always be in time-trouble. The most absurd by far was his 53-minute think over the theoretical move he knew against Vachier. It was sad to see Grischuk obtain winning chances against Alekseenko in Round 1, Nepomniachtchi in Round 2 and Wang Hao in Round 3 only to spoil them all in time-trouble. The most painful miss was against Wang Hao.

Alexander **Grischuk - Wang** Hao

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (3.3)

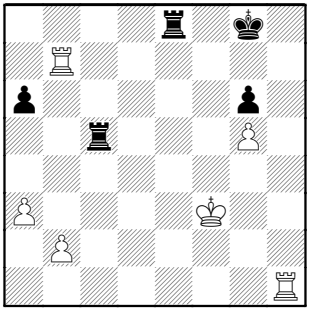


Grischuk masterfully outplayed his opponent from an Exchange French (arising via the Petroff move-order 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘e5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘e4 5.d3 ♘f6 6.d4 d5) and in his own words was 'almost winning'. Unfortunately now he misses a simple tactical trick that he had already seen some moves before.

34.g5? After something like 34.♗b1, with the idea of ♗a2 to attack the pawn on d5, White would have had a considerable advantage.

34...♘e4+! Of course, Wang Hao doesn't miss his chance. Now after the simplifications a drawn double-rook endgame occurs.

35.♗xe4 dxe4 36.♖e1 exf3 37.♖d7+ ♔f8 38.♖h1 ♔g8 39.♖xb7 ♖c2+ 40.♔xf3 ♖c5



Black wins the pawn on g5. The game was drawn on move 49.

½-½

Generally speaking Grischuk's play was of high level, but the awful time management was undermining all his efforts. A real pity, as he easily could have been in the lead.

FABIANO CARUANA

Caruana started as the true favourite he was. He showed phenomenal preparation with Black in Round 1 to put Vachier on the defensive and then with White to win practically out of the opening against Alekseenko.

Fabiano **Caruana** – Kirill **Alekseenko**

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (2.1)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 When playing 1.d4 Caruana has usually played the Catalan, though he has also allowed the Nimzo-Indian, so this shouldn't have been a surprise for Alekseenko.

3...♗b4 4.f3 But this was definitely a surprise. A sharp and ambitious set-up, aiming for e4, that requires precise knowledge by Black.

4...d5 The alternative is 4...c5, going for a Benoni-like structure.

5.a3 ♗e7 Alekseenko goes for a line that has recently become very topical, but it appears that this was exactly what Caruana was hoping for.

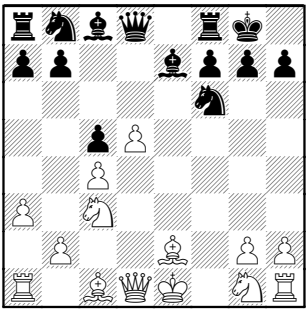
5...♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 has traditionally been considered as the most reliable choice for Black.

6.e4 dxe4 7.fxe4 c5 This is the modern treatment.

7...e5 8.d5 was played in the classic game Tal-Keres from the Candidates tournament in 1959. Nowadays it's considered that White has an advantage here.

8.d5 In the recent game Firouzja-Anand from Wijk aan Zee the promising youngster played 8.e5, but was outplayed in the endgame.

8...exd5 9.exd5 0-0 10.♗e2!

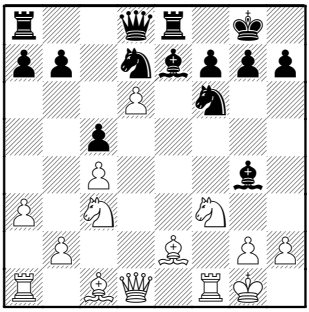


An important moment. White starts with the bishop move as the immediate 10.♘f3 allows 10...♗g4 without having to move the rook from e8. Having the rook on e8 is important for White, as we will see later.

10...♖e8 In case of 10...♗d6 White has 11.♘b5 as in the game Matlakov-Predke from the Russian championship in 2019.

11.♘f3 ♗g4 12.0-0 ♘bd7 Again, if 12...♗d6 then 13.♘b5 and the exchange of the dark-squared bishop is favourable for White who can then use his own unopposed dark-squared bishop to great effect, for example after ♗g5-h4-g3.

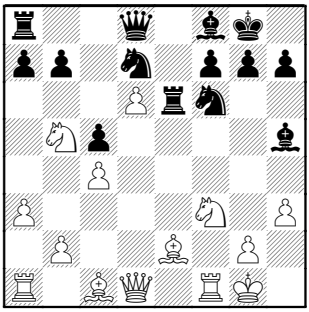
13.d6!



This is a very concrete approach and shows the strength of Caruana's preparation. The pawn can easily turn out to be a weakness on d6 and be lost, but armed with serious analysis Caruana puts immense pressure on his opponent.

13...♗f8 14.h3 ♗h5 15.♘b5 Now we see why White needed a rook on e8 - the threat is a fork on c7.

15...♖e6?!

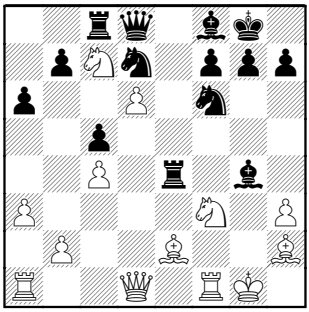


This is where Black goes wrong. He doesn't manage to get the pawn on d6 and is forced to give up material for insufficient compensation.

After 15...♖b8 Black is fine, though the position remains very complex. For example: 16.♗f4 *(16.♘c7 ♖e4 17.♗d3 ♗xd6 18.♗xe4 ♕xc7 gives Black good compensation for the exchange.; 16.♘xa7?! ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 ♖xe2 is good for Black.; 16.g4!? is an interesting option 16...♗g6 17.♗f4 a6 18.♘c7 ♖e4 19.♗h2 is an illustrative messy line.)* 16...a6 17.♘c7 ♖e4 18.♗g3 ♗xf3 19.♗xf3 ♖d4 20.♕e1 ♘b6 is another complicated and unclear position.

16.♗f4 a6 17.♘c7 ♖e4 18.♗h2 ♖c8 The threat is to take on f3 and play ...♖d4, so White's next is natural, practically forcing Black to sacrifice.

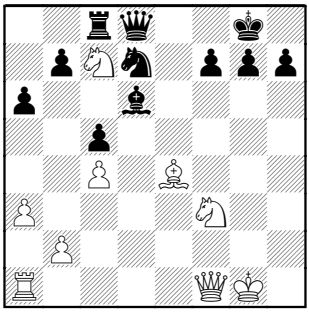
19.g4 ♗xg4



Black had to sacrifice, but the question was which piece.

19...♗g6? 20.♗d3 is just hopeless for Black as he is strangulated without compensation.; 19...♘xg4!? was an interesting alternative. 20.hxg4 ♖xg4+ 21.♔h1 ♖g6 and here it appears that Black has better chances than in the game. The position is more irrational and difficult to play for both sides, which increases the chances of the defender.

20.hxg4 ♘xg4 21.♗d3 ♘xh2 22.♗xe4 ♘xf1 23.♕xf1 ♗xd6?



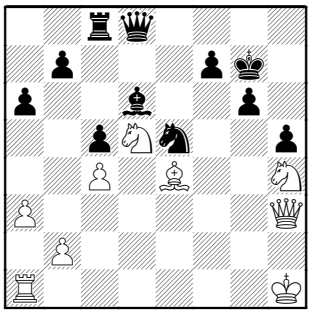
After this White is winning as Black doesn't manage to pose problems.

23...♘f6 was more resilient. 24.♖e1 ♘xe4 25.♖xe4 ♕xd6 26.♘d5 b5 is a better version for Black as his king is safer and he is faster to create counterplay on the queenside. White is better after 27.b3 but it's apparent that Black could have resisted more in this line.

24.♘d5 Caruana thought this was a very good position for him and he was right - there are three pawns for the piece but the strong d5-square and the possibility of creating threats on the kingside makes White's position much easier to play.

24...g6 25.♕h3 ♔g7 26.♔h1 The rook will join the game from g1.

26...♘e5 27.♘h4 h5



This weakens the kingside even more.

27...♖c6 was better, thought the result shouldn't be in doubt after 28.♖g1 ♗f8 29.♘f4 and sooner rather than later White will crash through.

28.♖g1 ♗f8 29.♘f4 29.♘f5+ ♔h8 30.♘f4 was another winning line.

29...♘g4 30.♘xh5+! gxh5 31.♗f5 The attack is irresistible.

31...♗e7 32.♗xg4 hxg4 33.♕xg4+ ♗g5 34.♕h5

1-0

Caruana played with confidence and power and it appeared that the trend would continue, as in Round three he introduced another stunning piece of opening preparation against Ding Liren. In the Classical Slav, an opening he hadn't used in classical chess since 2011, he introduced an incredibly complicated double pawn sacrifice.

Ding Liren – Fabiano **Caruana**

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (3.1)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 Ding admitted that he was surprised by the choice of the Slav by Caruana and considered taking on d5 and making a draw, but eventually decided to go for a more principled line.

3...♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 This is considered more critical than the alternative 6.e3.

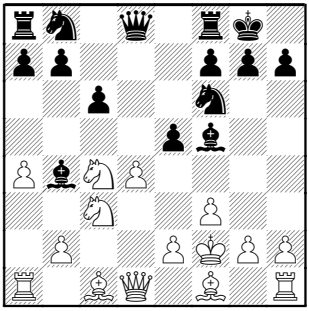
6...e6 The sharper move. The alternative is 6...♘bd7.

7.f3 ♗b4 Again Caruana goes for the sharper move. Both Kramnik and Anand famously used the alternative 7...c5 in their World Championship matches against Topalov in 2006 and 2010 respectively.

8.♘xc4 8.e4 was considered the main move for many years, but the complications after the forcing 8...♗xe4 9.fxe4 ♘xe4 10.♗d2 ♕xd4 11.♘xe4 ♕xe4+ 12.♕e2 ♗xd2+ 13.♔xd2 ♕d5+ 14.♔c2 ♘a6 are currently considered OK for Black.

8...0-0 9.♔f2 This move scores over 70% for White, but Caruana had a strong idea in mind.

9...e5!



A shocking move! Black changes the situation drastically. This idea is by far the most important theoretical discovery at the Candidates.

9...c5 has been played by Shankland, but after 10.e4 ♗g6 11.♘a2 is considered to be better for White, mostly thanks to the bishop on g6 being out of play.

10.♘xe5 The principled move. The engines like White in all the lines, but things are far from easy for White who needs to defend.

10.dxe5 ♘fd7 11.♗f4 was an alternative; 10.e4 was another option for White. 10...exd4 11.♘a2 is unclear after either 11...b5 or 11...♗c5.

10...♗c2 A nice yet typical shot.

11.♕d2 11.♕xc2? ♕xd4+ is at least equal for Black.

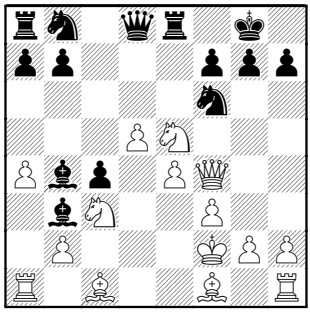
11...c5 Black is well ahead in development and has the safer king, so he aggressively opens the position. In a way, this approach reminds me of Caruana's sacrificial idea in the Grunfeld from his game against Giri at the Moscow Candidates in 2016 where at one point he was 4(!) pawns down.

12.d5 White wants to keep the position closed in order to finish development.

12...♗b3 13.e4 ♖e8 14.♕f4 Not only defending the knight but also getting away from a possible double-attack by a knight from e4.

14.♘c4? ♖xe4! being the point.

14...c4!

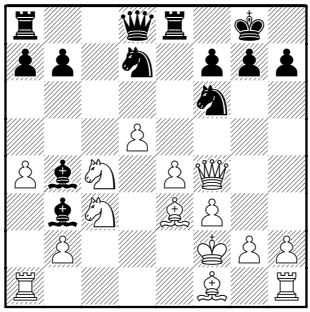


Adding more fuel to the fire: another pawn is sacrificed in order to open the g1-a7 diagonal.

15.♘xc4 15.♗xc4?! is tempting, but then the knight is pinned after 15...♗d6 16.♕e3 ♘bd7!, threatening ...♗c5. Black develops strong initiative after 17.♘xd7 ♘xd7 18.♕e2 ♗xc4 19.♕xc4 ♕h4+ 20.♔f1 ♗c5 21.♕e2 f5.

15...♘bd7 Black has good compensation for the two pawns and White must be very careful, but Ding Liren continues to make the first choices of the engine!

16.♗e3!



Covering the g1-a7 diagonal. What perhaps helped Ding Liren was that the strongest moves were also quite natural and, even though he had to calculate a lot to justify them, eventually his intuition and calculation were in unison.

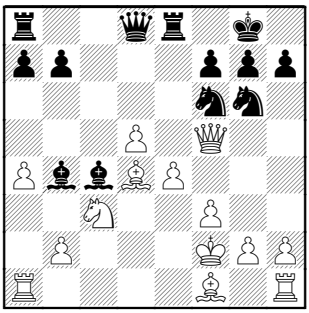
16...♘f8 17.♗d4! By now Ding Liren had around 25 minutes left while Caruana had more time on the clock than at the beginning of the game!

17.♗e2? is bad as, after 17...♗xc4! 18.♗xc4 ♖c8 19.♗e2 ♘g6 20.♕g3 ♗xc3 21.bxc3 ♖xc3, White's position falls apart.

17...♘g6 It seems it is either here or on the next move that Caruana forgets his analysis, though the losing mistake was made later.

17...♖c8!? was an alternative. 18.♘e3 ♘h5 19.♕g4 ♘e6 is incredibly complex: Black should still have sufficient compensation.

18.♕f5 ♗xc4

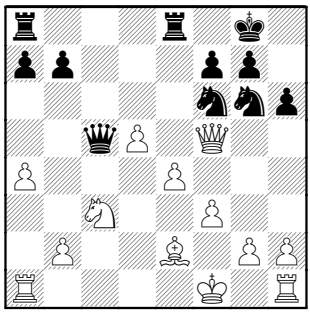


There was a better alternative to this exchange.

Again 18...♖c8! was the move to make. 19.♘e3 ♗c5 20.♗xc5 ♖xc5 with good compensation: sacrifices in the centre on d5, e4 and c3 are hanging in the air while Black also has ideas like ...♕b6.

19.♗xc4 ♕c7 20.♗e2 ♗c5 Caruana remembered this exchange of bishops but this is a worse version compared to the one after 18...♖c8. Still, Black continues to have compensation.

21.♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 22.♔f1 h6?



Too slow. After this White confidently defends against Black's attempts.

Only 22...♖e5! allowed Black to stay in the game. 23.♕h3 ♕b4 24.♖b1 ♘f4 25.♕g3 ♘6h5 26.♕f2 f5 with unclear play where White still has problems to solve.

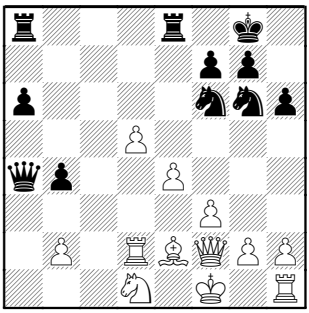
23.♖d1! A good move, allowing ♖d2 to defend the pawn on b2. Ding Liren continues to play with engine-like precision and doesn't allow a single chance.

23...♕b6 24.♖d2 ♕e3 25.♖c2 A very nice rearrangement of the pieces, safely defending everything. Black's initiative runs out of steam.

25...a6 Black doesn't have any other active idea but to push ...b5 before White consolidates by bringing the queen back.

26.♕h3 The queen goes to g3 and f2.

26...b5 27.♕g3 b4 28.♘d1 ♕b3 29.♖d2 ♕xa4 30.♕f2



Black returns one pawn but White has consolidated and with the strong centre he has a winning advantage.

30...♕d7 31.g3 ♕h3+ 32.♔g1 a5 33.♕d4 ♘h5 34.♘f2 ♕d7 35.f4 White is steamrolling through the centre. Black now sacrificed on f4 but couldn't create anything serious and Ding Liren won the game on move 59.

1-0

A dramatic game. A couple of factors coincided to work against Caruana. Ding Liren was on 0 out of 2, but he wasn't playing badly; he lost two games because of 1-move blunders. When under the tremendous pressure of Caruana's novelty he mustered his best qualities and superbly calculated his way through the maze of complications. The other factor was the character of the position. While objectively sound, the sacrifices required computer-like precision to prove the compensation and Caruana was doing well while he could play these moves from memory. But once he could no longer rely on it, he could not maintain the same level of precision and the compensation immediately disappeared, practically ending the game. I am certain that Caruana and his team were aware of the latter factor being a possible problem, so most likely they expected Caruana's fast play and pressure both on the clock and on the board to outweigh it. Alas, the Chinese player rose to the occasion and made the second factor the decisive one.

My feeling was that this game broke Caruana's rhythm and affected his confidence. Perhaps he expected things to run smoothly after the first two rounds and the excellent preparation he got in against Ding Liren, so losing the game and getting back to 50% seemed to be against the run of play. Once that happened, though, he seemed as if in a state of mild shock and this showed in his play. First, he misplayed a very promising position against Nepomniachtchi in the next round and then was outplayed and lost against Giri in Round five. Then in Round six he didn't get the maximum from the position against Grischuk.

Caruana showed probably the best preparation of all the participants and this preparation was based on forcing and aggressive variations, much akin to Kasparov's in the late 1990s. This happened in almost all his games: with Black against Vachier, Ding Liren and Grischuk and with White against Alekseenko and Nepomniachtchi. But in spite of this, all was decided in that one game against Ding Liren - with a win Caruana would have been leading the tournament; with the loss he is on 50%.

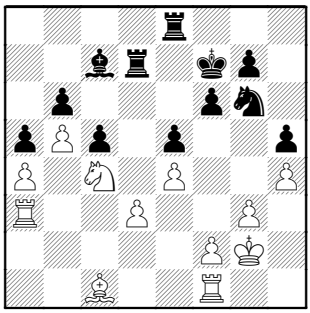
WANG HAO

Wang Hao was the only participant who openly stated even before the tournament started that he didn't want

to be there. Perhaps this unwillingness took away the tension of the tournament and he started with a win over his compatriot, taking advantage of his premature activity.

Ding Liren - **Wang** Hao

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (1.2)



Ding Liren outplayed his compatriot from the English Opening and here he has an advantage: The knight on c4 is dominating the bishop on c7 and attacking the weak pawn on b6. White also has the better bishop. His only weakness is the pawn on d3 so bringing the king to e2 and then a preparation for f4 was the logical way to continue. Quite uncharacteristically, Ding Liren rushes with the f4-push.

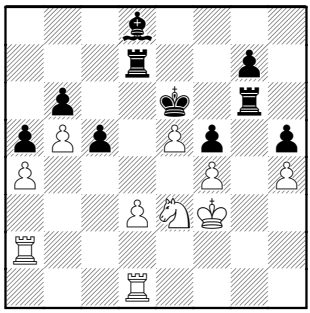
30.f4? Just premature.

30.♔f3, with the idea of ♔e2,♗e3 and then perhaps ♖a2-d2 to cover d3, was preferable. Eventually White will push f4 under favourable conditions.

30...exf4 31.♗xf4 ♘xf4+ 32.gxf4 f5! 33.e5 ♖e6 With his previous move Black fixed White's pawns and now had ample ideas to attack them: ...♖d4 targets both d3 and f4 and ...♖g6-g4 attacks f4 and h4. If necessary the bishop can also attack the pawn on h4 from d8.

34.♔f3 ♖g6 35.♘e3 Covering the g4-square, for now.

35...♔e6 36.♖d1 ♗d8 37.♖a2



Objectively a mistake, but the better moves were typical engine salvations.

37.♖c3 is the engines' choice, though it looks very shaky from a human perspective. The pawn on h4 is lost, but White creates counterplay after 37...♖d4 *(37...♗xh4? 38.d4! suddenly wins for White as 38...cxd4 39.♖c6+ ♔f7 40.♘xf5 all White's pieces are in the attack.)* 38.♖c4 ♗xh4: curiously enough, the moves for both White and Black are forced: 39.♖h1 ♖g3+ 40.♔e2 g5 41.♖xd4 cxd4 42.♘c4 ♖g2+ 43.♔d1 ♖a2 looks dangerous for White, but somewhere around move 55, after forced moves by both sides, White manages to save himself with an exchange sacrifice;

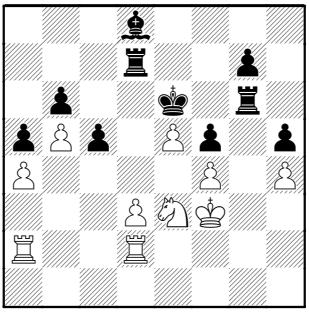
37.♖h1 was also preferable to the game move. It does look awful for White after 37...♗e7, threatening ...c4. 38.♘c4 ♖g4 39.♘xb6 ♖d4 40.♘c4 ♖dxf4+ 41.♔e2 ♖g3, but he manages to stay afloat after 42.♖c3.

37...♖d4 37...♗xh4 was possible, with the same idea as later in the game: 38.♖h2 ♖g4!

38.♘c2 ♖d5 39.♘e3 ♖d7? Allowing an accidental chance that Ding Liren misses.

39...♖d4 40.♘c2 ♖d7 41.♘e3 ♗xh4 was still possible.

40.♖dd2?



The last move of the time control.

40.d4! was the saving resource. 40...♖xd4 *(40...cxd4? 41.♖c2!* loses for Black, as we have seen from the same idea in the comments to White's 37th move.*)* 41.♖xd4 cxd4 42.♘c2 ♔d5 43.♘xd4! ♔xd4 44.♖d2+ ♔c5 45.♖xd8 leads to rook endgame that is drawn thanks to the strong passed pawn on e5. For example: 45...♖g1 46.♖d2 with the idea of starting to push the pawn and support it by ♖e2.

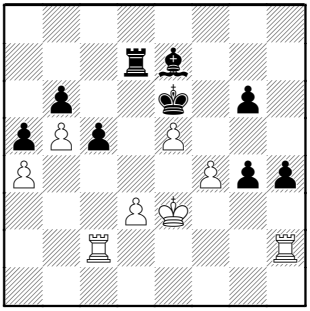
40...♗xh4! Wang Hao takes the chance.

41.♖g2 ♖g4! Now White's position collapses. He cannot defend the pawns on a4, d3 and f4 and taking the exchange allows Black a pawn mass on the kingside.

42.♖h2 42.♘xg4 fxg4+ 43.♔e3 g5 wins.

42...g6 Defending the pawn on h5 so the bishop can move.

43.♘xg4 fxg4+ 44.♔e3 ♗e7 45.♖ac2 h4



With the pawns marching, the king coming to f5 and the rook to d4 White is helpless.

0-1

Wang Hao had his share of missed chances but he has only himself to blame. He got technically winning positions against Giri and Vachier, but he misplayed both. This shortcoming of his, an unreliable technique for a player of that calibre, is hurting him again. The game he lost to Nepomniachtchi was another technical position - at this level the competition is unforgiving. With such a gaping shortcoming Wang Hao cannot hope for more, but so far his tournament is far from being bad.

Sharing last place are Alekseenko and Ding Liren, with 2.5 out of seven.

DING LIREN

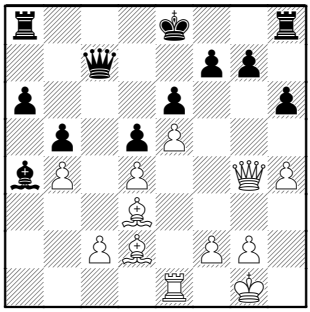
The big surprise is **Ding Liren**, who was rightfully considered the favourite before the tournament. We can only speculate whether the quarantines, first in China and then in Russia, had a negative impact on him, but his awful start with two losses was definitely not expected. It's interesting that he played pretty well in Round one against Wang Hao and only spoiled his advantage with rushed activity. In Round two he made a blunder out of the opening against Vachier. This was really surprising as the Spanish is an opening that has been

his mainstay for many years now. He also lost in one of his usual lines against Nepomniachtchi. Blunders are a sign of bad form and that is what Ding Liren suffered from. He wasn't playing badly per se, as his game against Caruana showed, but he lacked his usual consistency and resilience. The game against Nepomniachtchi was typical - when faced with a normal novelty in a variation he had played many times before he didn't show his usual level of play and was outplayed as if there was a difference in class.

From the seven games he played **Alekseenko** had winning chances at one single moment - on move 26 of his game against Nepomniachtchi and this was the result of Nepomniachtchi's provoking a crisis rather than Alekseenko creating them.

Kirill **Alekseenk** – Ian **Nepomniachtchi**

FIDE Candidates 2020 Yekaterinburg RUS (3.4)



White has compensation for the exchange in view of the locked-out bishop on a4. In search for chances Nepomniachtchi takes a considerable risk with his next move.

25...g6?! 25...g5 was better, but perhaps Black was worried that White might close the kingside by 26.h5 *(26.hxg5?! plays into Black's hands after 26...hxg5 27.♕xg5 ♕e7 with ...0-0-0 to follow and Black can use the open files on the kingside.)*

26.h5? With some 15 minutes left Alekseenko couldn't calculate well enough the complications after the natural capture on g6.

26.♗xg6! fxg6 *(26...0-0-0* is better, but Black has given away a pawn and the pawn on h6 is weak after *27.♗d3)* 27.♕xe6+ ♕e7 28.♕c6+ ♔f7 29.h5! the winning move that White had to foresee. 29...gxh5 30.♖e3 with a mating attack. 30...h4 31.♖f3+ ♔g7 32.♖f4 White needs the g-file. 32...h5 33.♖f5! finally arriving there.

26...gxh5 27.♕xh5 0-0-0 The king is safe now and the game is balanced. It ended in a perpetual on move 40.

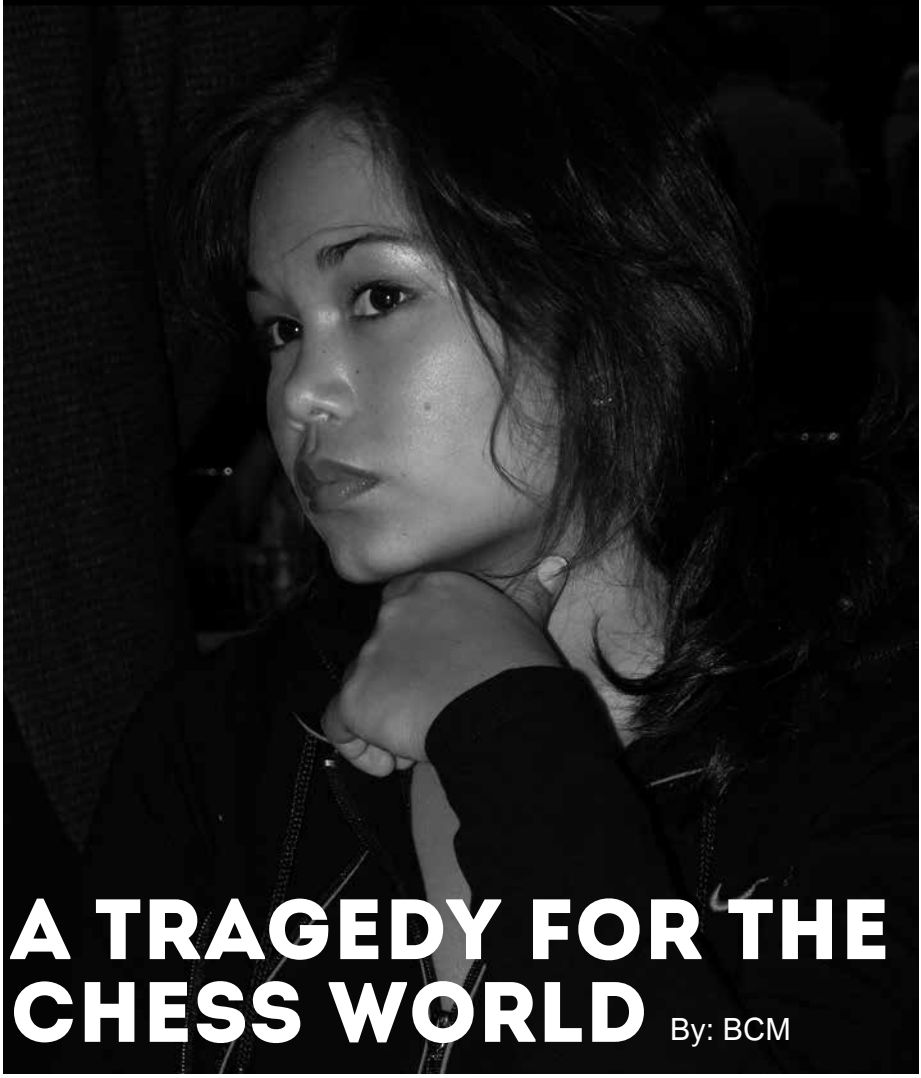
½-½

In the other games he was either suffering or holding the balance. The fact that he couldn't create winning chances against this opposition means that he is (still) not there yet. I cannot imagine any other participant losing that knight endgame against Giri, even with seconds left on the clock. With no real expectations as to the result, the tournament is an invaluable learning experience for him, something akin to Andreikin's debut in the 2014 tournament.

With half the tournament games played out, what remains to be seen is what happens next. At the time of writing, nobody knows.

STANDINGS AFTER SEVEN ROUNDS:		
1-2.	**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Ian Nepomniachtchi**	4½
3-6.	**Fabiano Caruana, Anish Giri, Wang Hao, and Alexander Grischuk**	3½
7-8.	**Ding Liren and Kirill Alekseenko**	2½

THE PASSING OF WIM ARIANNE CAOILI (1986-2020), THE WIFE OF LEVON ARONIAN



A TRAGEDY FOR THE CHESS WORLD

By: BCM

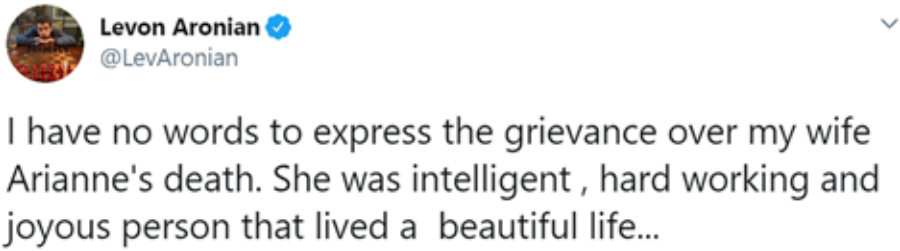
The chess world has lost a great player and a great voice. On 31st March, Arianne Caoili passed away after in a hospital in Yerevan (Armenia), aged 33.

On the 15th of March Arianne Caoili's car crashed into a supporting column under the bridge near the intersection of Sebastia Street and Isakov Avenue in Yerevan, Armenia. She was brought to the intensive care unit of the Astghik Medical Centre in a critical condition but, sadly, never recovered.

A TRUE CHESS LOVE

Arianne and Levon Aronian first met in 1996, at the World Youth Chess Championships in Las Palmas, and became friends in 2006, being introduced by their mutual friend Alex Wohl. They got officially engaged in 2015 and married on 30 September 2017 at the 13th-century Saghmosavank Monastery, with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and his wife Rita Sargsyan in attendance.

When Aronian had managed to beat Ivanchuk at the Quarter-finals of the World Cup 2017, Arianne had driven for over 500 kilometers from Yerevan to Tbilisi to meet her to-be husband and spend the weekend supporting him. *(From Chessbase India)*


Levon Aronian
@LevAronian
I have no words to express the grievance over my wife Arianne's death. She was intelligent , hard working and joyous person that lived a beautiful life...

Arianne was an excellent chess player with a highest Elo rating of 2309 and the WIM title. In 2017, she married Levon Aronian, the world's seventh strongest player. Aronian announced her death in a message on Twitter: 'I have no words to express the grievance over my wife Arianne's death. She was intelligent , hard working and joyous person that lived a beautiful life... I love you honeybun, sleep tight....'.

Apart from being a chess player, Caoili worked as a political advisor to the Armenian Prime Minister and was engaged in a series of social causes. She was also a former model, dancer, boxer, and lover of extreme sports. She also managed a strategy consultancy and founded and led the *Champord Weekly* - a newspaper distributed freely on public transport in Armenia. In 2018 she drove 2000 kilometers by bike to raise funds totalling $5,500 for the Children of Armenia Fund.

Born in Manila, Philippines, Caoili began playing chess at the age of six years. On 22 December 2000, she won the Asian girls under-16 championship in Bagac, Philippines. The following year, she scored 5½/9 points in the strong Conca Della Presolana tournament in Italy. In the FIDE rating list of October 2002, Caoili achieved her peak rating of 2309. In 2004 Caoili transferred between chess federations to represent Australia. In 2009, she won the London Chess Classic Women's Invitational tournament with a score of 8/9, two points ahead of the runner-up. In the same year, Caoili won the Oceania Women's Zonal Championship and, as a result, qualified to play in the Women's World Championship 2010. However, in this competition she did not show up. Caoili played for the Philippines

in the Women's Chess Olympiad in 1998 and 2000. She represented Australia in the same competition in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. (Information from Wikipedia.)

Arianne Caoili was a promoter of chess and one of its great ambassadors.

After her death was announced, condolences poured in from the entire chess community, including Magnus Carlsen and Garry Kasparov.

Viswanathan Anand @vishy64theking · Mar 31

Replying to @LevAronian

Dearest Levon. Our deepest condolences. We knew Arianne since she was a young girl and later on became your wife. She always was so friendly and polite. She had so many interests that both of you shared. Our prayers and thoughts are with you.

Jovanka Houska @thelittlehat · Mar 31

Replying to @LevAronian

Heartbreaking news. Arianne was one of a kind - she had such a positive energy that you truly felt she could change the world. It was a pleasure to have known her. My deepest condolences to you, Lev and your families.

Matthew Sadler @gmmds · Mar 30

Replying to @LevAronian

Terrible news Levon. All the strength and courage in the world :-(

Garry Kasparov

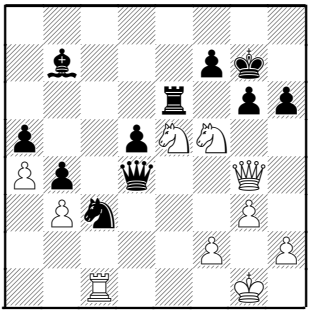
@Kasparov63

My deep condolences Levon, and to the many others whose lives were made brighter by Arianne. twitter.com/LevAronian/sta

Arianne **Caoili** - Vladimir **Epishin**

Malaga op 3rd Malaga (4), 28.02.2000

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.c4 e6 4.g3 ♗a6 5.b3 ♗b7 6.♗g2 ♗b4+ 7.♗d2 a5 8.0-0 0-0 9.a3 ♗e7 10.♘c3 d5 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♕c2 ♖e8 13.♖fc1 ♘a6 14.♗f4 ♕d7 15.♘a4 ♗d6 16.♗xd6 ♕xd6 17.e3 h6 18.♘b2 c5 19.♘h4 ♖ac8 20.♘c4 ♕e6 21.♕f5 cxd4 22.exd4 ♕c6 23.♖c2 b5 24.♘e3 ♕d6 25.♖xc8 ♗xc8 26.♕d3 ♘c7 27.♘hf5 ♕b6 28.♖c1 b4 29.a4 g6 30.♘h4 ♔g7 31.♘f3 ♗a6 32.♕c2 ♘e6 33.♕d1 ♗b7 34.♗h3 ♘e4 35.♗xe6 ♖xe6 36.♘e5 ♘c3 37.♕g4 ♕xd4 38.♘f5+



1-0

Openings for Amateurs

by Pete Tamburro, ptamburro@aol.com

Historic Match, Historic Game

Recently, on the ICC, a British player (anonymous) played the King's Gambit against me. I replied with a defence I'd played for almost 50 years. We decided to play a whole series of them so he could try and improve - which he did. It was like being in a chess club again where your opponent doesn't disappear after the game is over.

It made me think back to an old friend, IM Mike Valvo (1942-2004), who won an extraordinary public correspondence match with Deep Thought in 1989. You can see the USCF ratings of the two back then - a heavyweight match. Valvo won, 2-0. The game that stunned everyone 30 years ago was Valvo using the c6 gambit in the Falkbeer. Fortunately, I kept my copy of The Atlantic Chess News (July-August, 1989), which I had co-founded with Glenn Petersen back in 1973. It's now an annual. Valvo wrote all his thoughts in addition to his analysis (which can be found on Chessbase), and I will share some of those here. For amateurs, it is a wondrous lesson on not only how to play a gambit, but how to keep opening lines to an opponent's uncastled king.

Enjoy!

'Ken Thompson visited the Deep Thought team in Pittsburgh at this point and indicated that things were in near panic after reception of Black's fourteenth. I believe he said at the time Deep Thought searched 35 plies (17 moves!) and could not find a refutation. This caused a stir on the net and a Deep Thought groupie wanted to bet me five dollars that the machine could hold its position. Everything quickly quietened down when a member of the Deep Thought team told of the difficulties the machine was having.'

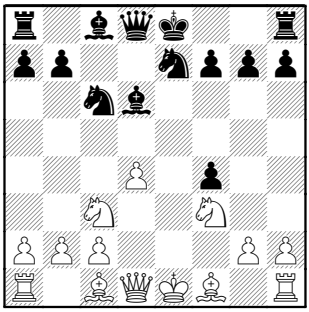
Deep Thought - IM Mike **Valvo**

Unix Mail m Internet, 1989

1.e4 e5 2.f4 d5 3.exd5 c6 4.♘c3 A critical alternative is the Metz line, thoroughly covered by John Shaw in his magnum opus, The King's Gambit. What follows here is a small addition to the conversation: 4.♕e2 cxd5 5.fxe5 *(In a league match, I once beat a master buddy of mine, Barry Spiro, with 5.♕xe5+ ♗e7 6.♕xg7?? ♗f6 7.♕g3 ♗h4 and the embarrassed smile on his face I will always remember. Then we played blitz for the rest of the night!)* 5...♘c6 6.♘f3 ♗g4 7.♕f2 ♗xf3! 8.gxf3!? (8.♕xf3! ♕e7 9.♕g3 *(9.d4 ♕h4+ 10.♕f2 ♕xd4=)* 9...♕xe5+! (9...f6?! 10.♘c3 0-0-0 11.d4 ♘xd4 12.♕g4+ ♘e6 13.♗e3 d4 *(13...h5 14.♕h3 d4 15.0-0-0)* 14.0-0-0 fxe5 15.♗c4 ♖e8 16.♗xd4 ♘f6 17.♕h3 exd4 18.♖he1) 10.♕xe5+ ♘xe5 11.d4 ♘c6 12.♗b5 ♘f6 13.♘c3 ♗b4 14.0-0 *(14.♗d2 0-0 15.♗xc6 bxc6)* 14...0-0 15.♘e2= *(15.♗d3?! ♘xd4 16.♖xf6 gxf6 17.♘xd5 ♖fd8 18.♘xf6+ ♔h8 19.♘xh7 ♘c6)* 15...♗d6 16.c3 ♖fe8=) 8...♘xe5 9.♕e3 *(9.d4 ♗e7!=)* 9...♕e7 10.d4 ♘xf3+ 11.♔f2 ♘h4 12.♗b5+ ♔d8 13.♘c3 ♕f6+ 14.♕f4 ♖c8=.

4...exf4 5.♘f3 ♗d6 6.d4 ♘e7 7.dxc6 7.♗c4 cxd5 8.♗xd5 *(8.♘xd5?? ♘xd5 9.♗xd5 ♕a5+-+)* 8...♘xd5 9.♘xd5 ♕a5+ 10.♘c3 0-0 11.0-0 ♖d8=.

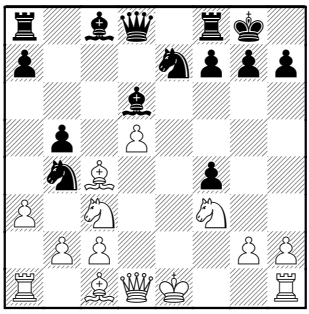
7...♘bxc6



8.d5!? Valvo cited Illescas-Nunn, Dubai Olympiad, 1986, as "White's best": 8.♗c4 0-0 9.0-0 ♗g4 10.♘e4 ♗c7 11.c3.

8...♘b4 9.♗c4 0-0 Valvo again refers to Nunn with 9...♗f5 10.♗b3 ♕b6! 11.a3 ♘a6 12.♕d4 ♘c5 13.0-0 0-0 14.♔h1 ♗d3!∓ Gallagher-Nunn, London, 1987.

10.a3 b5!!

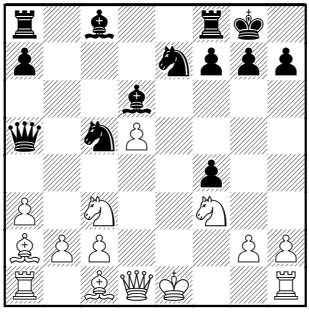


Improving on another old friend, GM Ron Henley, who had played 10...♘a6.

11.♗b3 Devastating for White is 11.♗xb5 ♘bxd5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗c6 *(13.c4 ♗b7! 14.0-0 a6)* 13...♗a6! 14.♕xd5 ♖e8+.

11...♘a6 12.♘xb5 12.0-0 ♗g4 13.♔h1 ♘c5 14.♘xb5 ♘xb3 15.cxb3 ♗e5=.

12...♕a5+ 13.♘c3 ♘c5 14.♗a2



14...♗a6 Valvo: 'At the time I thought this was the best chance as it seemed

my intended 14…♘e4!? would run into 15.♕d4 ♘c3 16.♗d2. However, 16...♖e8 is then more than adequate. White's best is 15.♗d2 ♘xd2 16.♕xd2 ♖b8 17.♘e4! with an unclear position. When the idea behind 14…♗a6 began to flow for me, I 'knew' it was the move I wanted to make…The more I looked at 14…♗a6 the better it felt, so I never returned to recheck 14…♘e4. Still, it was not without a great deal of trepidation that I mailed off this piece sacrifice. Ken Thompson visited the Deep Thought team in Pittsburgh at this point and indicated that things were in near panic after reception of Black's fourteenth. I believe he said at the time Deep Thought searched 35 plies (17 moves!) and could not find a refutation. This caused a stir on the net and a Deep Thought groupie wanted to bet me five dollars that the machine could hold its position. Everything quickly quietened down when a member of the Deep Thought team told of the difficulties the machine was having.'

15.b4 ♕**c7** 15...♕b6 16.bxc5 ♗xc5 17.♘e4 ♖fe8 18.♘xc5 ♘xd5+ 19.♔f2 ♕xc5+ 20.♕d4 ♖e2+ 21.♔g1 ♕xc2.

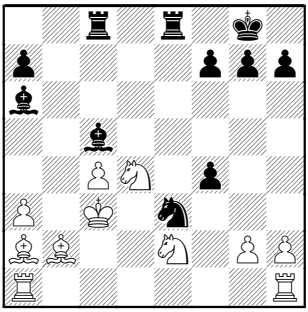
16.bxc5 16.b5.

16...♖fe8 17.♘e2 One gets a real appreciation of the concepts of opening lines to a vulnerable king and the usefulness of preventing castling. A variation worthy of study: 17.cxd6 ♕xc3+ 18.♔f2 ♘f5 19.♗xf4 ♕c5+ 20.♘d4 ♘xd4 21.g3 ♘e2+ 22.♔g2 ♘xf4+ 23.gxf4 ♖e2+ 24.♕xe2 ♗xe2 25.♗b3 ♕xd6.

17...♕xc5 18.c4 ♘xd5 19.♕d4 19.♕xd5 ♖xe2+ 20.♔d1 ♕xd5+ 21.cxd5 ♖xg2∓.

19...♕xd4 20.♘fxd4 ♗c5 21.♔d2 21.♔d1 ♘e3+ 22.♗xe3 ♖xe3 23.♔c1 ♗b7 24.♖d1 g5 25.♖d2 ♖ae8 26.♖b1 ♗xg2 27.♖b5 ♗xa3+ 28.♔d1 f3 The engine says equal, but I would bet money on Black's chances of winning at better than 50% in a tournament game. The superior placement of the black pieces, the white king with no pawn cover and the black king sitting quite comfortably at home give Black the edge.

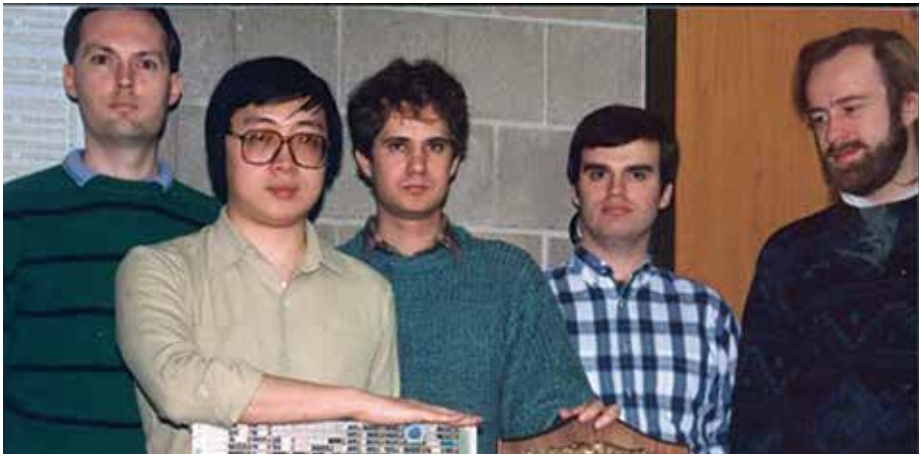
21...♘e3 22.♔c3 ♖ac8 23.♗b2



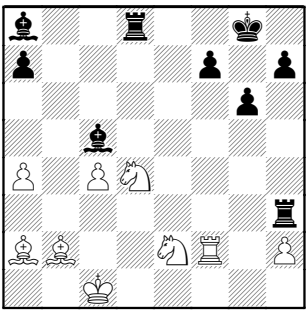
Valvo: 'I expected 23.♘xf4!? ♗xd4+ 24.Kxd4 ♘c2+ 25.♔c3 ♘xa1 26.♔b2 and it is still anyone's game. The smoke has cleared and Black has a rook and a pawn for the two pieces. The refutation of 23.♘xf4 is the dynamic 23…♖e4! (Henley) and after either 24.♘fe2 or 24.♘de2, 24…♘c4! And the white king is caught in a deadly crossfire. The Deep Thought operator mentioned on the next move something about sending off the 23rd move too quickly when he sent Deep Thought's 24th. Apparently, the machine was still considering its reply and he misread the information. I offered to let them retry (!!-PT) their 23rd, but they declined.'

23...♘xg2 Valvo: 'Deep Thought considered this a significant mistake and thought that 23...♗b6! would have led to a large black edge. The human part in me, however, cried for some tangible compensation for the piece it gave up some nine moves earlier. I didn't give enough weight to the 23...♗b6 and 24...♗a5+ idea. I just saw that 13...♘g3 would maintain an edge in initiative and recoup some material.'

24.♖af1 ♖cd8 25.♖hg1 ♖e3+ 26.♔d2 f3 27.♖xf3 ♖xf3 28.♖xg2 ♖h3 29.♔c1 g6 30.a4 ♗b7 31.♖f2 ♗a8!



The creators of Deep Thought after winning the Fredkin Intermediate Prize for Deep Thought's Grandmaster-level performance in 1988 (source: Wikipedia)



Valvo: 'Black tries to take advantage of the fact that White is nearly without moves. The only moves that seem available to White are 32.a5 and 32.♗b1. The former can be dealt with by losing a move through 32…f5 and the latter by swinging the rook on d8 to the b-line threatening ♖b4. Direct attempts such as 31…♖h4!? 32.♔d2 ♗xd4 33.♗xe4 ♖hxd4+ 34.♘xd4 ♖xd4+ 35.♔c3 and 31…♗e4!? 32.♗b1 ♗xb1 33.♔xb1 ♖h4 34.♔c2 ♖hxd4 35.♘xd4 ♗xd4 36.♗xd4 ♖xd4 37.♔c3 both give White some drawing hopes.'

32.♗b1 ♖b8 33.♗a2 ♖d3 34.♖f4 ♖d2 35.♔xd2 ♖xb2+ 36.♘c2 ♖xa2 37.♘c3 ♖b2 38.♖f6 ♔g7 39.♖f1 f5 40.♘d5 ♗xd5 41.cxd5 ♖b3 42.h4 ♔f6 43.♖e1 ♖h3 44.♖e6+ ♔f7 45.a5 ♖xh4 46.♖c6 ♗b4+ 47.♘xb4 ♖xb4 48.♖c7+ ♔f6 White resigned.

0-1

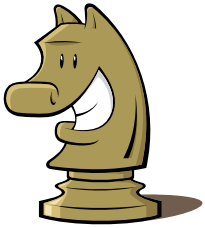
That same year Kasparov beat Deep Thought 2-0 as well, and understandably got more press coverage in the general public media.

I was disappointed not to see Mike's win mentioned in Chess Highlights of the 20th Century by Graham Burgess, in what is otherwise a remarkably thorough book.

Regardless, Valvo's gambit play, followed by a creative piece sacrifice, took a good deal of courage in addition to talent. Attacking a monster computer with tactical play was considered suicidal back then. This game was historic because it belied that opinion for the time being. It is a model of how to play in that vein because he used active play, rapid development and time-honoured concepts of opening lines and punishing kings that don't castle.

For me, this was a bittersweet walk down memory lane. We lost Mike too soon. Thankfully, his games are still with us.

YOU MAY NO LONGER BE ABLE TO READ RAY KEENE IN THE TIMES AND THE SPECTATOR, BUT YOU CAN NOW FOLLOW HIS WRITING WEEKLY IN THE ARTICLE (THEARTICLE.COM) AND IN THE BCM.

APRIL  FOOLED

By GM Ray Keene OBE

We all know the feeling. You have played a wonderful game. Perfect strategic build up, impressive concluding tactics, admiration from your team members, including demonstrating your masterpiece to them at the club afterwards. Then, possible publication in the chess circle newsletter, online blog or even sending it to the *BCM* for the worldwide chess community to enjoy.

However, as a final precaution you run the game past your analytical engine, only to have the all-seeing computer point out every single hole in your conduct of the game, including the faster wins you have missed. Even worse, when the infallible engine identifies the opportunities overlooked by your victim.

End of fantasy!

This month, two games of mine which I had been intending to include in my anthology of best games *Grandmaster Strategy*, published by Hardinge Simpole (http://www.hardingesimpole.co.uk/biblio/0951375792.htm). These games still exhibit points of interest, and one of them was instrumental in my winning the 1971 British Championship. Sadly, the computer intervention deprived both games of their hoped for status as perfect pearls of chess board strategy.

Raymond **Keene** - William **Hartston**

Cambridge University blitz tournament, 1968

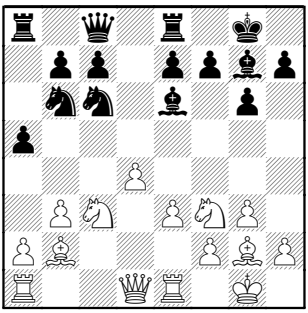
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0-0 5.♗g2 d5 In this fluid counter-attacking line, Black aims to set up the enemy pawn centre as a target for his minor pieces -a common theme of all Grünfeld systems.

6.cxd5 ♘xd5 7.0-0 ♘b6 Alternatively, 7...♘c6 8.♘c3 ♗f5 9.♘d2 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 e5 11.d5 ♘e7 12.e4 when White dominates the centre and Black must lose time with his attacked bishop; Keene-Miles, London 1973. Also premature is the attempt at central clearance 7...c5 8.dxc5 ♘a6 9.♘g5 ♘db4 10.♘c3 ♘xc5 11.♗e3 ♘ca6 12.♕b3 h6 13.a3 ♘c6 14.♖fdl with a clear advantage to White, Keene-Barreras, Capablanca Memorial 1974.

8.♘c3 ♘c6 9.e3 ♗e6 Preparing a manoeuvre to challenge White's raking bishop on g2. The slower 9... h6 10.♘el ♘b4 11.a3 ♘4d5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♘d3 also left White in command of the central zone in Keene-Williams, Cambridge University College Championship 1970. Rowson's *Understanding the Grünfeld* urges the merits of 9...♖e8. Perhaps best, though, is direct action with 9...e5 10.d5 ♘e7 (Filip-Hort, Harrachov 1966, continued 10...♘a5

11.e4 c6, with a satisfactory game for Black) 11.e4 ♗g4, when 12.a4 c6 13.a5 leads to complications; Keene-Hollis, Marlow Masters 1973.

10.b3 ♕c8 11.♖e1 a5 12.♗b2 ♖e8



This move, slightly weakening the f7-square, has fateful consequences which, however, at the time were impossible to foresee. If instead 12...a4, 13.♘xa4 ♘xa4 14 bxa4 and although White's extra pawn is enfeebled, it is not clear how Black can regain it.

13.♘e4 ♗h3 The exchange of bishops removes a valuable white piece, but loses time and gives White the chance to establish a grip over the queenside terrain.

14.♗xh3 ♕xh3 15.♘c5 ♖ab8 16.♖c1 White's 16th move revived the threat of ♘c5xb7, a tactical motif which will recur.

16...♕c8 17.♕d2 a4 18.b4 ♘a7 Over the next two moves White improves his chances further by invading the centre.

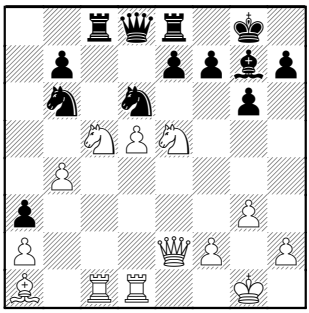
19.♘e5 c6 Playing to establish a light square blockade.

20.e4 ♘b5 White could now cement the queen's flank with 21.a3, but judged that if Black himself were to advance his a-pawn to a3 it would tend to create a source of weakness rather than strength.

21.♖ed1 ♘d6 22.♕e2 ♕d8 23.d5 a3

Hoping to unbalance the defence of White's aggressively posted knight on e5, but White's coming retreat is a complete answer.

24.♗a1 cxd5 25.exd5 ♖c8



At the time , and for many years afterwards, I was inordinately pleased with my next move , which sets up a variety of combinational motifs. However, as the computer (Stockfish) pointed out, when the time came to select games for my anthology, I could have struck at once with 26.♘xf7!! When the weakness of the e6 Square, which can now be invaded by a White knight, leads to Black's rapid demise in all variations.

26.♕f3 ♖a8 White's 26th set up an obvious attack against the weakling on a3, but also a masked threat against Black's king's defences. The only chance would have been 26...♗xe5 but the surrender of Black's fianchettoed bishop would invite all sorts of future problems in his king's field.

27.♘xb7! A decisive deflecting sacrifice.

27...♘xb7 Black has no choice, but now White's legions storm in.

28.♕xf7+ ♔h8 29.♘xg6+ After the obligatory 29...hxg6, 30.♕xg7 is mate. Black resigned.

1–0

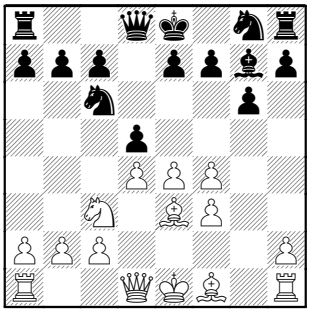
Ludgate v Keene

British Championship, Blackpool 1971
Modern Defence [B06]

1. d4 g6 2.e4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘c6!? A relatively unexplored line, which Botterill and I christened the "Pseudo-Austrian Attack" in our book on 1 ...g6 in Batsfords' "Contemporary Chess Openings" series. I had just completed the work on the relevant chapter before the commencement of the British Championship, so I felt comparatively confident about entering the complexities attendant on the variation.

5.♘f3? An error already, which leads by force to a severe deterioration of White's pawn structure. 5.♗e3 is best - see last month's column.

5...♗g4 6.♗e3 ♗xf3 7.gxf3 d5!



A Soviet idea. If now 8.♘xd5 then 8... e6 followed by ♘c6xd4 and Black dominates the centre; or if 8.exd5 ♘b4 9.♗b5+ ♔f8 10.a3 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 12.♕e2 ♘h6, Unzicker-Keene, Hastings 1972, and White's shattered pawns are more serious than the temporary displacement of Black's king. Nunn-Keene, Hammersmith 1971, went instead 7...e6 8.♕d2 d5 9.f5 exf5 10.exf5? (10.♘xd5! is much better) 10...♕h4+ 11.♗f2 ♕e7+ 12.♗e2 ♗h6 13.f4 0-0-0 14.0-0-0 ♕d6 15.♗g3 gxf5 16.♖hf1 ♘ge7 17.♗f3 ♗g7 18.♕f2 ♖de8 19.♕g2 ♘xd4 (the kernel of Black's strategy) 20.♘xd5 ♘xd5 21.♗xd5 ♘e2+ 22.♔b1 ♕b4 0-1, owing to 23.♗b3 ♘c3+.

8.♘e2 e6 9.♕d3 ♘ge7?! 9...f5 followed by ♘g8-f6 would have been more accurate, increasing the pressure against White's e-pawn and thereby inviting the positional capitulation e4-e5. Play would then resemble Nimzo-Indian double pawn strategy, but on the other side of the board!

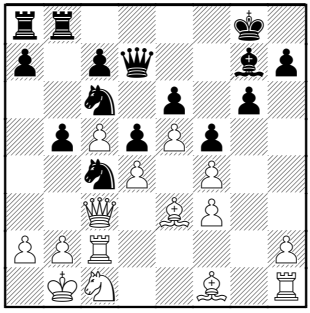
10.0−0−0 f5 11.♔b1 White offered a draw here, but it's a bit premature.

11...♕d7 12.c4 White plays to block the position. 12.♗g2, followed by an attempted knight manoeuvre via c1 and d3 to e5, would be a better plan.

12...0−0 13.c5 Now Black has a target.

13...b6 14.♖c1 ♖fb8 15.e5 An understandable reaction. By now White was nervous about pressure against b2 from the rook on b8 and Black's bishop.

15...♘a5 16.♖c2 ♘c4 17.♘c1 ♘c6 18.♕c3 b5



19 ♗xc4? This condemns White to eternal passivity. My opponent had only considered the 'aggressive' recapture 19...bxc4 and had overlooked the positional advantages conferred on Black by recapturing with the d-pawn. White should retain his light squared bishop and lash out with 19.h4.

19...dxc4 20.h4 h5 21.♖gl ♘e7 22.♕el ♔h7 23.♖g3 ♗h6 24.♘e2 ♘d5 25.♗d2 a5 26.♕gl ♕f7 White's position is riddled with weaknesses, but Black now makes no attempt to force matters until after the first adjournment. For the next 14 moves Black concentrates simply on improving the coordination of his pieces.

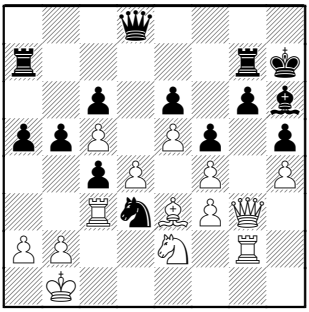
27.♖cl c6 28.♕el ♕e7 29.♖g2 ♕a7 30.♕g3 ♖g8 31.♕el ♕a6 32.♕dl ♘b4 33.♖c3 ♘d5 34.♖cl ♖ab8 35.♕c2 ♖b7 36.♖g3 ♕a8 37.♕dl ♕d8 38.♖h3 ♖gg7 39.♕el ♖a7 40.♖h2 ♕a8 41.♖g2 ♘b4 Now Black's lines of inner communication are well nigh perfect and this time, in contradistinction to the feint on move 32, the invasion is meant seriously.

42.♖c3 To capture the knight and allow an irruption on a2 would be immediately fatal.

42...♕d8 Glancing at the white h-pawn and considering ♖a7-d7 and ♖d7xd4 as a promising exchange sacrifice.

43.♕g3 ♘d3 Threat: 44...♘xc5 45.dxc5 ♕xd2.

44.♗e3



44...♘xc5 The game had been adjourned (remember this was played during the Cretaceous Period, when adjourned games were still part of the landscape) and I thought I had prepared this sacrifice as meticulously as possible.

45.dxc5 b4 46.♖xc4 Three decades later, the dastardly Fritz pointed out the refutation 46.♖c2! ♕d3 47.♘c1! ♕xe3 48.♖xc4, when ♖g2-e2 will win Black's queen!

46...♕d3+ 47.♖c2 ♕xe3 47...a4 is also possible, but this is the most clear-cut.

48.♖g1 ♖ad7 Black takes over the centre and picks up White's weak pawns.

49.♖f1 ♖d5 50.♖el ♕d3 51.♘c1 ♕b5 52.♕h2 ♖xc5 Another strong possibility is 52...♖gd7.

53.♘b3 ♖xc2 54.♕xc2 a4 55.♘c5 b3! 56.axb3 axb3 57.♘xb3 ♗xf4 Sealed at the end of the second session. The game was adjourned again.

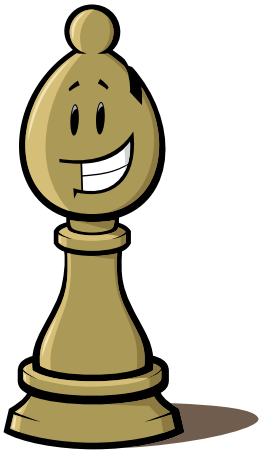
58.♘c5 58.♘d4 would fail to 58...♕d5 59.♘xc6 ♖c7 60.♘b4 ♕a5 61.♕b3 ♖b7 and wins.

58...♖a7 Now 59.♘xe6 fails to 59...♕a5 60.♕f2 ♕a2+ 61.♔c2 ♖b7!.

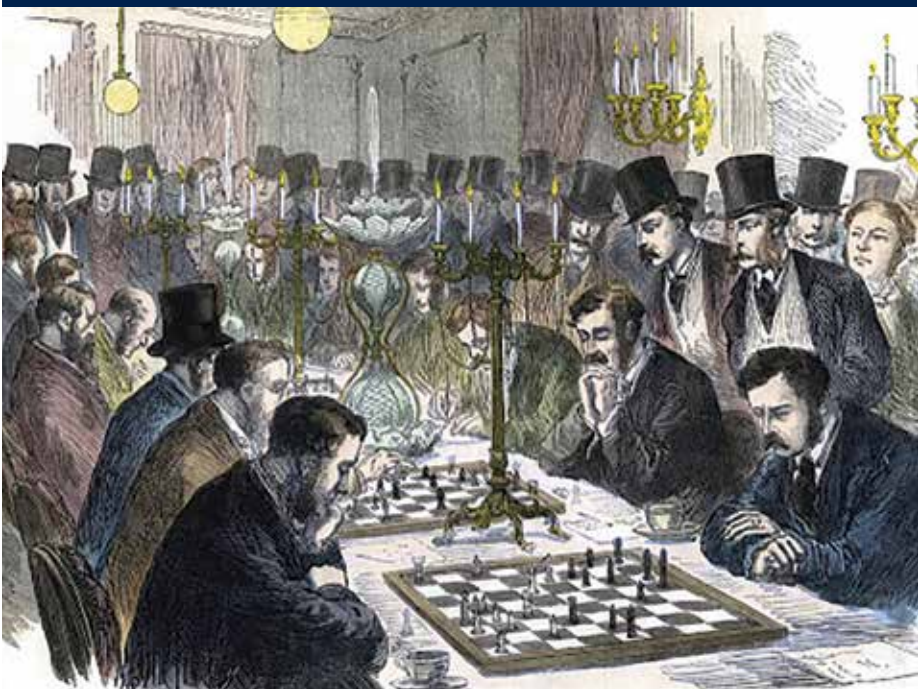
59.♕c3 ♗d2! The last trick.

60.♕xd2 ♕xc5 61.f4 ♕c4 62.♖d1 ♕e4+

0–1



THE 138TH VARSITY CHESS MATCH 2020



CAMBRIDGE OUTPERFORMS OXFORD

By IM Shaun Taulbut, Photo: Oxford University Chess Club

The 138th Varsity Chess Match was held at the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall on 7th March 2020. The match sponsors were Henry Mutkin and the RAC Club.

This year's event had a special guest of honour - the Iranian chess player Shohreh Bayat (who also played a role as one of the match officials, alongside Matthew Carr and David Sedgwick). Shohreh Bayat fled to Britain in January seeking asylum after a photograph of her at the women's world chess championships in Shanghai was circulated on social media. This was met with heavy criticism by Iranian state media and officials. In an interview in the February issue of BCM, Shohreh Bayat said that she feels the UK is the safest country for her and that she hopes to stay here and continue playing chess.

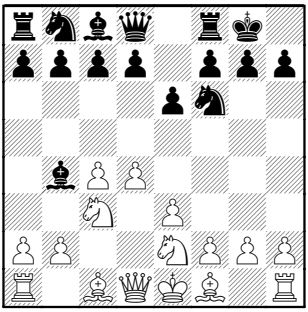
This year's Varsity match was won by Cambridge, beating Oxford 5.5 to 2.5. Cambridge won three boards, with the other five boards being drawn.

Cambridge were expected to win in view of the average rating difference of more than one hundred points and the first win came from Ryan Rhys Griffiths in the following game:

Ryan-Rhys **Griffiths** - Daniel **Abbas**

Varsity Oxford-Cambridge 138th London, RAC (1.3)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♘ge2

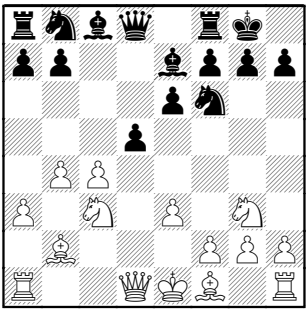


White plans to recapture on c3 with the knight if Black exchanges bishop for knight on c3, thus avoiding the doubling of the c-pawns: a slower approach but leaving Black with less active play.

5...d5 6.a3 ♗d6 Also playable is 6...♗e7 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘f4, with a slight advantage for White.

7.♘g3 White develops but Black is able to open the position to benefit his better development; 7.c5 ♗e7 8.b4 b6 9.♘f4 ♘c6, with an equal position, is also playable.

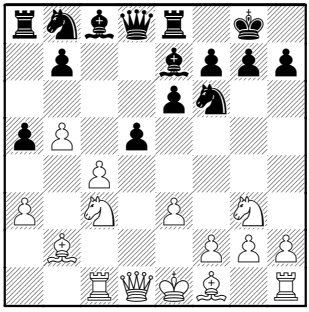
7...c5 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.b4 ♗e7 10.♗b2



10...a5 Probably best is 10...♘c6 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♗e2 d4 13.exd4 ♘xd4 14.♘ce4 ♘xe4 15.♕xd4 ♗f6 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6, with an almost equal position.

11.b5 ♖e8 Maybe this is too passive; worth consideration was 11...dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♕c7 or ; 11...♘bd7 12.cxd5 ♘b6 13.dxe6 ♗xe6, which gives Black play for the sacrificed pawn.

12.♖c1 Now White has the advantage with the black queenside pieces having little scope.



12...dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♘bd7 Also possible was 13...♕xd1+ 14.♖xd1 ♘bd7 15.♘a4 b6 16.0-0, with an edge for White, but this may be preferable.

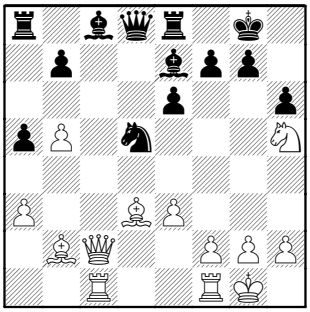
14.0-0 ♘b6 15.♗d3 White keeps the queens on the board, planning to attack the kingside.

15...♘bd5 If 15...e5, 16.♕e2 ♗g4 17.f3 ♗d7 18.♘ge4, with a better position for White.

16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♕c2 h6 17...g6 18.♖fd1 keeps White's advantage.

> *This year's Varsity match was won by Cambridge beating Oxford 5.5 to 2.5. Cambridge won three boards with the other five boards being drawn*

18.♘h5



The pressure increases on Black as he cannot drive the knight away with ...g6 because of ♗xg6, winning, so now White has a clear advantage.

18.♖fd1 is also good for White.

18...♗f8 19.e4 19.♖fd1 is also very strong.

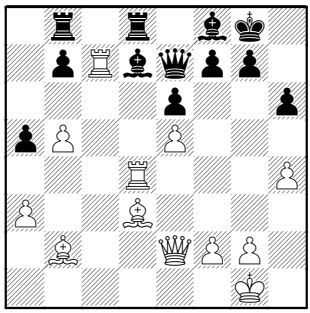
19...♕g5 20.♕e2 ♘f4 20...g6 21.exd5 ♕xh5 22.♕e3 ♕xd5 23.♖fd1 is also dangerous for Black but this may be the best survival chance.

21.♘xf4 ♕xf4 22.e5 White is much better now as the Black queen's bishop has little scope.

22...♖d8 After 22...♗d7 23.g3 ♕g5 24.♖c7 ♕d8 25.♖xb7 ♗c8 26.♕e4 g6 27.♖xf7 is winning for White after 27...♔xf7 28.♕xg6+ ♔e7 29.♕h7+ ♗g7 30.♕xg7#

23.♖c7 ♖b8 After 23...♖d7 24.♖fc1 ♖xc7 25.♖xc7 leaves Black with few moves, but now White could win immediately with 24.g3 ♕g5 25.h4, trapping the queen.

24.♖fc1 ♗d7 25.♖1c4 ♕g5 26.h4 ♕e7 27.♖d4



Black is tied down by the pin of the bishop and White is preparing Qe4.

27...♕e8 28.h5 White prevents Black from blocking the kingside with ...g6 before ♕e4.

28...♖bc8 29.♖xb7 ♗c5 30.♖g4 ♔f8 31.♕e4 ♖b8 32.♕h7 If 32 ...♖xb7 33.♕xg7+ wins after 33 ...♔e7 34 ♕f6+ ♔f8 35.♕xh6+ ke7 36.♕f6+ ♔f8 37.h6 with the threat of ♖g8+, followed by ♕g7 mate.

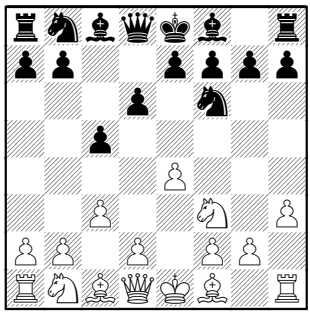
1-0

The second Cambridge win was from Gustavo Leon Cazares

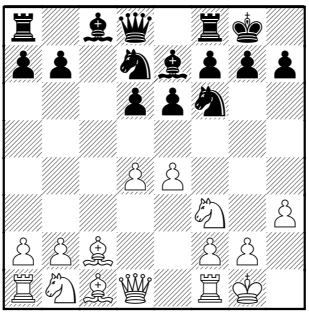
Gustavo Leon Cazares - Andrew Rogozinski

Varsity Oxford-Cambridge 138th London, RAC (1.7)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.h3



4...♘bd7 5.♗d3 e6 6.0-0 ♗e7 7.♗c2 0-0 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4



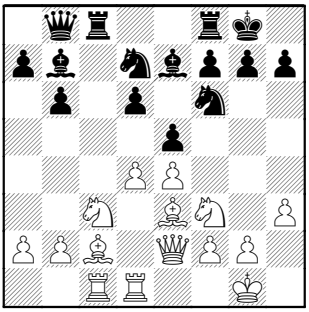
White has a space advantage and an easier game to play

9...e5 9...b5 10.♕e2 ♗b7 leaves White with a slight advantage but this gives Black more play.

10.♘c3 White has the advantage because he has more space and Black has to defend.

10...b6 10...a6 11.♕e2 b5 12.♖d1 ♕c7 13.♗e3 b4 14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.exd5 ♗f6 16.♖ac1 ♕a5 17.♗g5 is better for White, eg 17...exd4 18.♕d3 g6 19.♗xf6 ♘xf6 20.♕xd4 with strong play.

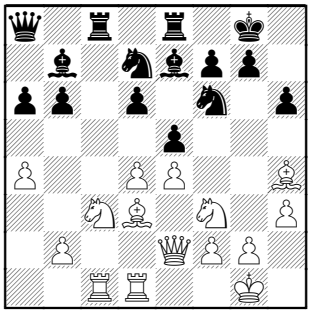
11.♕e2 ♗b7 12.♖d1 ♕c7 13.♗e3 ♖ac8 14.♖ac1 ♕b8



Black moves his queen out of danger but White retains his edge.

15.♗d3 Controlling the light squares on the queenside restricts Black.

15...♕a8 16.♗g5 a6 17.a4 h6 18.♗h4 ♖fe8



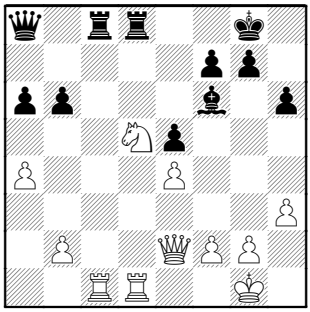
Black defends the bishop so White chooses to simplify and play to establish a piece on d5.

19.dxe5 ♘xe5 20.♘xe5 dxe5 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♗c4 Aiming to control d5 is a clear plan.

22...♖ed8 Better is 22...♗g5 23.♖c2 ♖ed8 24.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 when 25.♗d5 leaves White slightly better.

23.♗d5 ♗xd5 Again 23...♗g5 is best.

24.♘xd5



White has achieved his aim of occupying d5 and the knight is a terrific piece.

24...♖xc1 A mistake, giving up control of the c-file; 24...♗g5 is best.

25.♖xc1 ♖xd5 After 25...♗g5 26.♖c7 ♖b8 27.♕c4 White is much better but the exchange sacrifice is handled very well by White.

26.exd5 ♕xd5 27.♕xa6 ♕d4 If 27...g6 28.♕xb6 is winning because of the passed a-pawn which cannot be stopped.

28.♕c8+ ♔h7 29.♕f5+ ♔g8 30.♖c8+ ♗d8 31.♖a8 White simply threatens to double on the back rank, winning.

31...♔f8 32.♕c8 ♔e7 33.♖a7+ ♔e8 34.♕c6+ ♔f8 35.♖d7 ♕h4 36.g3 ♕g5 37.h4 ♕f6 38.♕xf6 ♗xf6 39.♖d6 Winning the b-pawn and the game as Black must rush his king to the queenside.

39...♔e7 40.♖xb6 e4 41.♔f1 ♔d7 42.♔e2 ♔c7 43.♖xf6

1-0

After Black recaptures, the white king invades via e3 and f4 and Black is defenceless.

Cambridge moved further into the lead when Harry Grieve won but Oxford still had chances until a draw was agreed on Board 2, giving Cambridge the necessary points for victory.

138TH VARSITY CHESS MATCH 2020

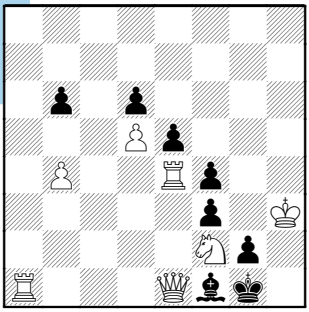
Rk	Oxford University	Rating	Nat	2½-5½	Cambridge University	Rating	Nat
1b	**Victor Vasiesiu (Hertford)**	2276f	ROU	½-½	**Matthew Wadsworth (Queens')**	2416m	ENG
2w	**Joris Gerlagh (University)**	2262	NED	½-½	**Conor Murphy (Christ's)**	2394f	IRL
3b	**Daniel Abbas (Magdalen)**	2240f	ENG	**0-1**	**Ryan Rhys Griffiths (Wolfson)**	2351f	IRL
4w	**Filip Mihov (Balliol)**	2213	MKD	½-½	**Jonathan Tayar (Homerton)**	2344m	CAN
5b	**Akshaya Kalaiyalahan (Regent's Park)**	2149f	ENG	**0-1**	**Harry Grieve (St Catharine's)**	2359f	ENG
6w	**Nashlen Govindasamy (St Anne's)**	2055c	RSA	½-½	**Declan Shafi (Pembroke)**	2158	SCO
7b	**Andrew Rogozinski (Worcester)**	1880	USA	**0-1**	**Gustavo Leon Cazares (Selwyn)**	2085	MEX
8w	**Daniel Sutton (St John's)**	1874	ENG	½-½	**Imogen Camp (Queens')**	1849wc	WLS
	Av. Rating = 2118.6			**2½-5½**	Av. Rating = 2244.5		

PROBLEM WORLD

by Christopher Jones
cjajones1@yahoo.co.uk
Grandmaster of Chess Composition

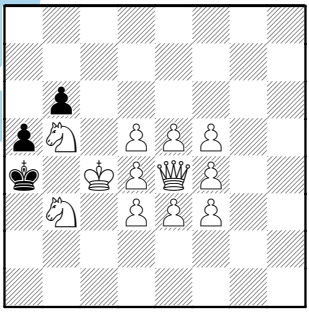
Solutions are given on page 254

1



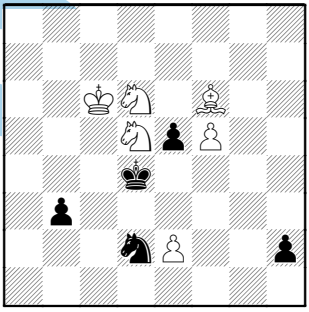
Nikolay Akimov (Kazakhstan)
Mate in 3
ORIGINAL

2



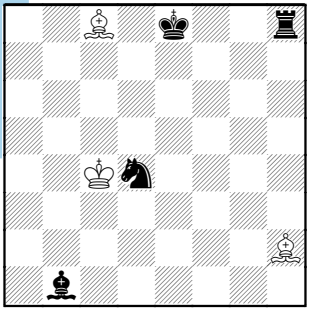
Kurt Keller (Germany)
Mate in 4
ORIGINAL

3



Paul Michelet (London)
Mate in 5
ORIGINAL

4



Kabe Moen (USA)
Helpmate in 3 (b) Rh8>a8
ORIGINAL

ANOTHER OCCASION WHEN CHESS WAS PLAYED DESPITE GLOBAL CHAOS

LENINGRAD – MOSCOW 1941

CHOOSING THE ABSOLUTE CHAMPION IN ABSOLUTE GLOBAL MAYHEM

By Milan Dinic

The 2020 Candidates, which took place at the same time as the world descended into chaos caused by COVID-19, is not the only time chess was played while all hell broke loose globally. This was also the case in 1941, when from 23rd March to 29th April a match for the "absolute champion of the USSR" took place.

While the top Soviet chess players gathered in Leningrad (St Petersburg) to play the first part of the event (the second was played in Moscow in the House of the Unions, next to the Bolshoi Theatre), the world was racing towards mayhem as a new global war was spreading.

By March 1941, Hitler had already taken Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and France. Germany was engaged in the Battle for Britain, then in late 1940 started preparations to assist Italy in the Balkans, which culminated with the invasion of Yugoslavia and the devastating bombing of Belgrade on Easter Sunday, 6th April 1941. Nazi puppet states and leaders were being appointed across Europe - from Vidkun Quisling in Norway to Philippe Pétain in France to the Balkans where the Nazi "Independent state of Croatia" was formed, led by Ante Pavelic. While the scene was being set for the ultimate chess tournament, the Soviet government was also busy, sending troops to eastern Poland and later to Baltic states (in its 'sphere of influence').

The 1941 tournament was to be the last big chess event in war-torn Europe until the end of World War 2 (excluding the tournaments played under the auspice of Nazi Germany).

While the top Soviet chess players gathered in Leningrad (St Petersburg) to play the first part of the event (the second was played in Moscow in the House of the Unions, next to the Bolshoi Theatre), the world was racing towards mayhem as a new global war was spreading

The event featured the top six players from the 12th USSR Championship, which took place from September to October 1940 (and where Keres played, thanks to Estonia's being co-opted into the USSR; and Lilienthal, a Hungarian Jew who emigrated to USSR in 1935, got Soviet citizenship only a year before, in 1939). At that tournament, Botvinnik - the rising Soviet and global chess star at the time, the *primus inter pares* of the Soviet chess scene, surprisingly, finished fifth. He later complained that 'the conditions were not very propitious for creative concentration', pointing to the disturbance caused by the audience in the hall. On Botvinnik's initiative, the Soviet authorities quickly sprang to organise the 1941 championship to determine the ***absolute*** champion.

Isaac Boleslavsky

In the 1941 event, the selected top six players from the 1940 tournament played each other four(!) times: Mikhail Botvinnik, Paul Keres, Vasily Smyslov, Isaac Boleslavsky, Andre Lilienthal and Igor Bondarevsky. The tournament would eventually determine who would be the rightful challenger to Alexander Alekhine for the world title he was holding on to.

Paul Keres

As now with COVID-19, so then with the war - everything was moving fast and changing rapidly. After a personal appeal to the foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, Botvinnik was allowed not to work for three days a week, to have time for preparation.

A letter sent to Botvinnik's bosses by none other than Soviet foreign minister Molotov read: 'It is absolutely essential to maintain Comrade Botvinnik's readiness to play chess and ensure that he has the time for further improvement.' It seemed that Botvinnik's chess skills were as important as the Russian war effort. Botvinnik's chess success and the title of world champion was his 'thank you' note to Molotov's letter.

Vasily Smyslov

The 1941 tournament saw two future world champions play - Botvinnik and Smyslov, as well as "the eternal second", Paul Keres. Interestingly, at the start of the event,

Andor Lilienthal

Igor Bondarevsky

Mikhail Botvinnik

Boleslavsky was feeling unwell, and later on, other players got sick - Keres, Lilienthal and Botvinnik. However, back then, that was not considered a cause for concern and they played on.

Botvinnik and Keres had a good start - with two victories each. In round three Botvinnik (as Black) in the Nimzo-Indian defence defeated Keres in just 22 moves! However, in round four, playing the Queen's Gambit, he lost to Bondarevsky in 89 moves. In the last game of the first part of the event, Botvinnik defeated Smyslov and secured a point and a half advantage over Keres, Boleslavsky and Lilienthal. Botvinnik confidently increased his advantage in the latter part of the event, eventually taking the tournament and becoming the absolute champion of the USSR (a title which he took three more times - in 1944, 1945 and 1952). Alongside with his three victories before World War 2 (1931, 1933, 1939), Botvinnik altogether holds six titles of the Champion of the USSR, a score later matched only by Mikhail Tal.

But even back then (as now with the Candidates), questions were asked about the purpose of the event: 'This tournament was held as a competition for the title of absolute champion of the USSR, but what this title means in relation to chess is still not clear to me', Paul Keres said.

Just over two months after the tournament to determine the absolute champion of the USSR, Nazi Germany launched 'Operation Barbarossa' - a codename for the attack on the Soviet Union. This put a halt to chess even in the Soviet Union.

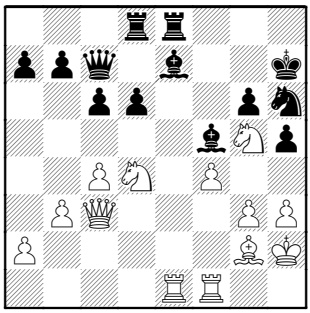
The match between Botvinnik and Alekhine never took place as the Russian émigré died in March 1946. Botvinnik was one of five players to play at the 1948 World Chess Championship, held at The Hague and Moscow. With a score of 14 out of 20 games, three points ahead of Smyslov, he won the tournament and became the sixth World Champion.

Two notable victories of Mikhail Botvinnik from the 1941 USSR Championship:

Mikhail **Botvinnik** - Andre **Lilienthal [E67]**

USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad- Moscow URS (2), 24.03.1941

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 d6 5.g3 ♘bd7 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 e5 8.e4 ♖e8 9.♗e3 exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘e5 11.b3 ♘fg4 12.♗f4 ♘c6 13.♘de2 f5 14.h3 ♘f6 15.exf5 ♗xf5 16.♕d2 h5 17.♖ae1 ♕d7 18.♔h2 ♔h7 19.♗g5 ♘e5 20.♘f4 c6 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♘e4 ♗e7 23.♕c3 ♕c7 24.♘e2 ♖ad8 25.f4 ♘f7 26.♘d4 ♘h6 27.♘g5+



Black resigned.

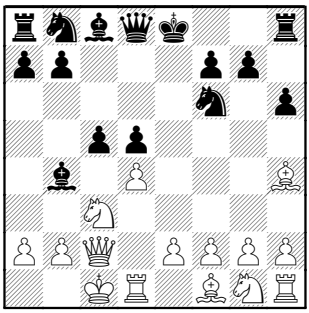
1–0

USSR ABSOLUTE CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT	
Name	
Mikhail Botvinnik	13.5/20
Paul Keres	11/20
Vasily Smyslov	10/20
Isaac Bolesavsky	9/20
Andre Lilienthal	8.5/20
Igor Bondarevsky	8/20

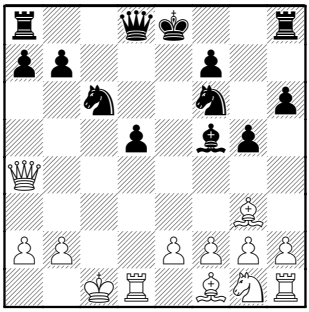
Paul **Keres** - Mikhail **Botvinnik [E34]**

USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad- Moscow URS (3), 26.03.1941

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗h4 c5 8.0-0-0



8...♗xc3 9.♕xc3 g5 10.♗g3 cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♘c6 12.♕a4 ♗f5



13.e3 ♖c8 14.♗d3 ♕d7 15.♔b1 ♗xd3+ 16.♖xd3 ♕f5 17.e4 ♘xe4 18.♔a1 0-0 19.♖d1 b5 20.♕xb5 ♘d4 21.♕d3 ♘c2+ 22.♔b1 ♘b4

White resigns.

0-1

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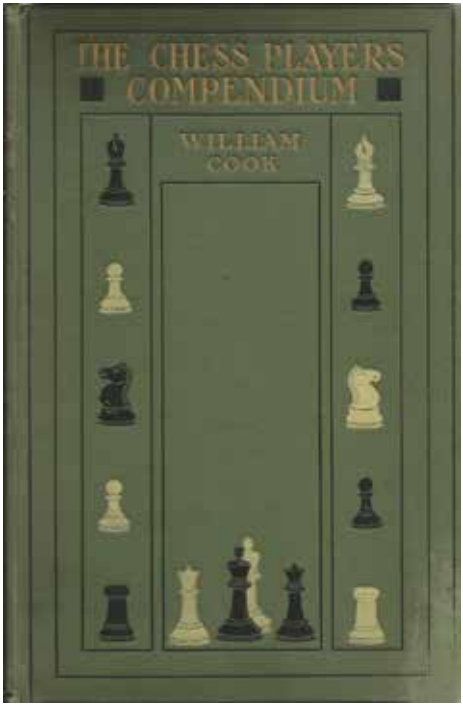
QUOTES AND QUERIES

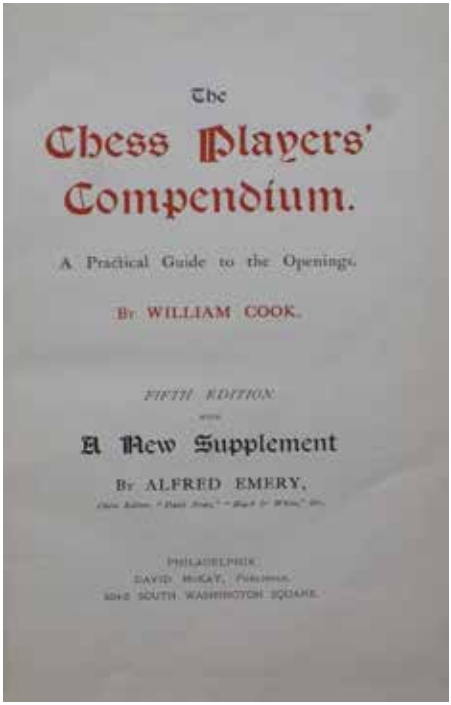
The great British chess authors and their games

By Alan Smith

6171 William Cook (1850 - 1917) is primarily remembered as the author of three chess books: *Synopsis of the chess openings* (1874); *Chess Primer* (1880) and his magnum opus the *Chess Compendium* (1902). The Compendium gave the first 20 moves of over 2000 chess games and was an achievement on a par with George Walker's *Chess Studies*.

He played little tournament chess, but did take 3rd prize at Birmingham 1883, defeating Amos Burn, with black, in the play-off for third and fourth. He also defeated Henry Bird on level terms. Cook also conducted the chess column of the *Bristol Times and Mirror*. Here is one of his games - against Henry Bird.





Some of the greatest chess books ever written

Henry **Bird** – William **Cook**

Purssell's 1888

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.0–0 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 Heading back into the Max Lange Attack, rather than investigating the murky waters of 5...♗xd4 6.♘xd4 ♘xd4 7.f4.

6.e5 d5 7.exf6 dxc4 8.♖e1+ ♗e6 This position can arise from the Scotch Gambit, the Giuoco Piano and the Two Knight's Defence.

9.fxg7 ♖g8 10.♘g5 ♕d5 11.♘c3 ♕f5 12.♘ce4 0–0–0 13.♘xc5 ♕xc5 14.♖xe6 fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♕d5 16.♘xd8 ♖xg7! An important zwischenzug.

17.g3 ♘xd8 18.♗f4 ♘e6 19.♕d2 ♕f3 20.♗e5 ♖g6 21.h4 ♕e4 22.♖e1 ♕xh4 23.♕a5 ♕h3 24.♕xa7 ♖h6 25.f3 ♕h1+ 26.♔f2 ♖h2#

0–1

Leeds Mercury, 21st July 1888

6178 The first edition of *Modern Chess Openings* was published by the British Chess Magazine in December 1911. A handbook of 191 pages it was available for the sum of two shillings seven and a half pence. Subsequent editions became more detailed as the march of opening theory continued.

6179 John Herbert White (1880-1920) was co-author of the first two editions of *Modern Chess Openings* with Hampstead CC club mate Richard Clewin Griffith. White's tournament appearances were few, at his best he tied for the club championship in 1916, but lost the play-off match to L. Estrin. If you get the impression he was not very ambitious, that does not mean he was a weak player. He won games from his co-author and also defeated two future British champions, George Thomas and William Winter. He was partial to the Vienna Gambit, 1.♘c3 and pioneered an irregular Catalan which he used to defeat the Middlesex champion in the following game.

John Herbert **White** - Julius du **Mont**

Hampstead CC Ch, 1915

1.d4 d5 2.♘d2 ♘f6 3.c3 ♗f5 4.♘gf3 e6 5.g3 ♘bd7 6.♗g2 ♗d6 7.0–0 c5 8.♘h4 ♗g6 This is playing white's game, 8...♗g4 is a tougher nut to crack.

9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♕c7 13.♕f3! This takes away black's option of castling long, f7 needs protection.

13...♖b8 14.♗g5 ♗e7 Black ought to have castled here, but even then 15.h4 looks strong.

15.♗f4 e5 16.dxe5 ♘xe5 17.♕e2 ♗f6 If 17...0-0 white has 18.♗xg6.

18.♗xe5! ♕xe5 19.f4 ♕e7 20.♕b5+ ♔f8 21.♖fe1 a6 If black attempts to exchange queens with 21...♕d6 22.♖ad1 ♕b6 then white keeps up the pressure with 23.♕c4!

22.♕b6 ♕e6 23.♕xc5+ ♗e7 24.♕c7 ♖c8 24...♕c8 forces the queens off, but loses another pawn 25.♕xc8+ ♖xc8 26.♗xb7 ♖b8 27.♗xa6 ♖xb2 28.♖e2!

25.♕xb7 ♗c5+ 26.♔h1 ♗f2 27.♗d5 ♕f5 28.♖e7! ♕xd5+ 29.♕xd5 ♔xe7 The respite black gained from sacrificing his queen was purely temporary.

30.♕b7+ This forces the black king into the open.

30...♔f6 30...♔e6 31.♖d1!

31.♕xa6+ ♔f5 32.♕d3+ ♔f6 33.♕d6+ ♔f5 34.♕e5+ 34...♔g4 35.♕e2+.

1–0

Field, 10th July 1915

6180 Percy Wenman (1891-1972) was a more prolific author of books in a lighter vein. His breakthrough year was 1911, he was third in the championship of the Metropolitan Chess Club, but struggled in the Major Open at Glasgow. Settling in that city, he contested matches with two Scottish champions and defeated them both! He beat M'Kee +5=3-3 and Gibson +7=5-5.

William **Gibson** – Francis Percival **Wenman**

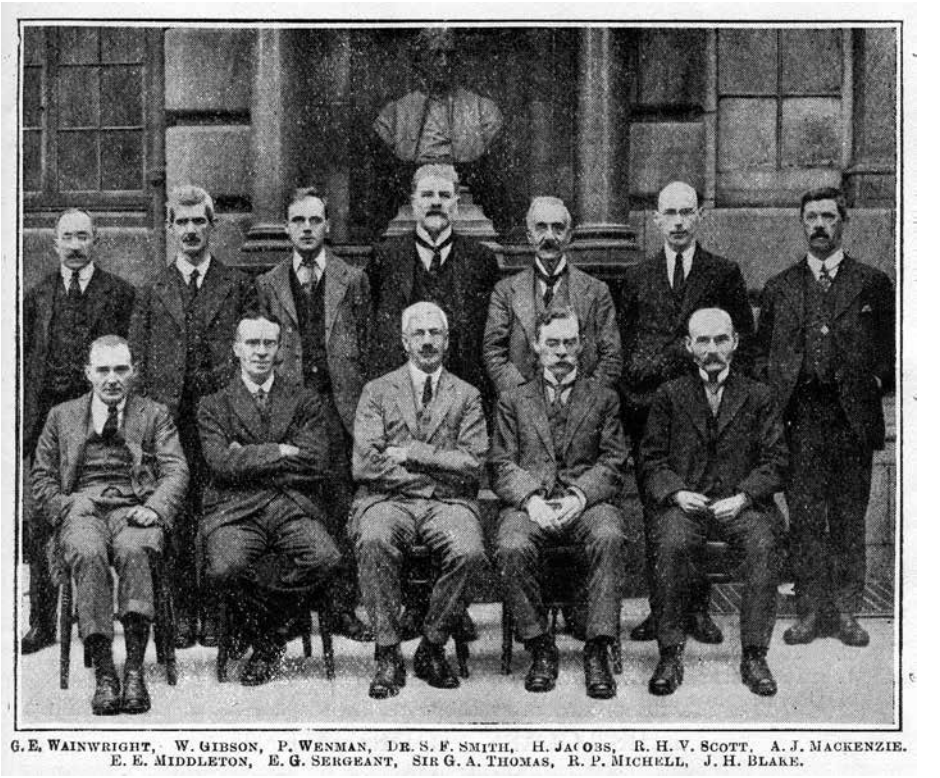
Match game 6, Glasgow 1911

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 c5 3.e3 e6 4.b3 ♘c6 5.♗b2 ♘f6 6.♘bd2 ♗e7 7.♗d3 cxd4 8.exd4 0–0 9.0–0 ♘b4 10.♗e2 ♗d7 11.♘e5 11.a3 is better.

11...♘c6 12.c4 ♗b4 13.♘df3 ♘e4 14.♖c1 f6 15.♘d3 15.♘xd7 is better 15...♕xd7 16.c5! followed by a3 and b4 mobilising his queen's side pawn majority.

15...♗d6 16.♘d2 this is too passive 16.c5 keeps an edge.

16...♕c7 17.f4 g5! Increasing the pressure on white's position.


G. E. WAINWRIGHT, W. GIBSON, P. WENMAN, DR. S. F. SMITH, H. JACOBS, R. H. V. SCOTT, A. J. MACKENZIE.
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The contestants in the 1920 British Championship, held in Edinburgh. Percy Wenman is standing third from the left. (s]Source: https://www.chessscotland.com/)

18.♘xe4? The losing blunder. 18.g3 was mandatory.

18...dxe4 19.♘c5 ♗xf4 20.♘xd7 ♕xd7 21.♖b1 ♗e3+ 22.♔h1 ♗xd4 White lacks play for his two pawn deficit.

23.♗a3 ♖fd8 24.♕c2 f5 25.b4 ♗e5 26.♗h5 ♕d2 27.♕a4 g4 28.♗c1 ♕e2 29.♗g5 ♖d4 30.b5 ♖xc4 31.♕a3 ♖c2 32.♖g1 ♖c3 33.♕a4 ♖h3! 34.gxh3 ♕xh2#

Falkirk Herald 20th December 1911

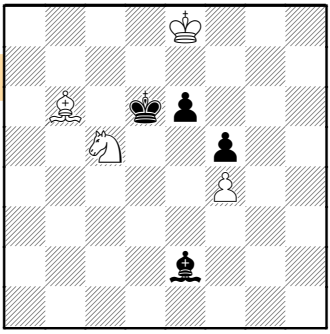
Wenman was less successful against Carrick Wardhaugh in 1912. He played in six Scottish championships and always finished in the top three, he tied for first in three events 1912, 1914-15 and 1920. He won the title in 1920 defeating William Gibson +2=1-1 in the play-off match. He moved to Leeds in 1922. The best result of his subsequent career was winning his section at Scarborough 1925, he lost the play off game to Max Romih.

He published *Gems of the Chessboard* in 1940 and it ran to five editions by 1945.

Endgame Studies

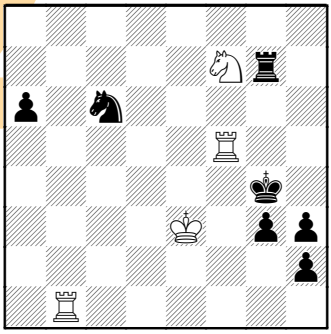
by Ian Watson
ian@irwatson.demon.co.uk

1



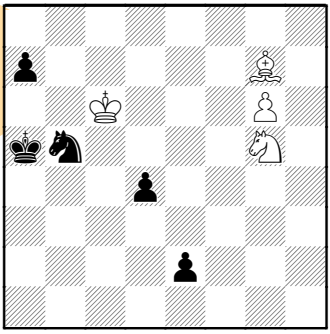
S Isenegger
Gunst MT 1958
WIN

2



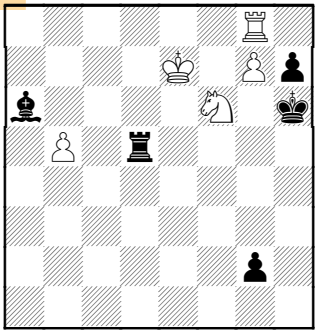
E Pogosyants (v. M Garcia 2012)
Schweizerische Schachzeitung 1976
WIN

3



D Nilolajev
USSR Sports Comm Ty 1955
WIN

4



D Gurgenidze
Etyudnaya Moza 2000
WIN

Solving in Britain

Chess solving events in Britain include, of course, the British Chess Solving Championship. It was won this year by John Nunn. (That's a statement I could have made in many previous years too.) He easily outscored the field which included such top solvers as Jonathan Mestel, a former world champion at chess solving.

The event also has a Minor competition, limited to those whose solving Elo is below 2000, and our first study this month was used in that competition. The second is from the Championship itself. There's a qualifying competition for the British Championship, which everyone can enter, and if you don't succeed in qualifying, there's the Minor and there's also an Open that you can take part in. The qualifying competition for the Championship begins with a two-move problem, which is published in many chess magazines, and in national newspapers, in May; if you solve that correctly, you are sent a set of harder problems to solve, and the highest scoring solvers on those qualify for the final - have a go this year! Our third study is from the 2019/20 qualifying competition.

The British solving circuit has a new event this year. On May 24th, we are holding a solving competition in central Sheffield. It is, surprisingly, the Israeli Open Solving Championship. In spite of the name, it's held simultaneously at multiple venues worldwide, with all competitors solving the same problems at the same time - much like the International Solving Contest which I described in last month's column. Also like the ISC, there's a Minor competition for those who don't want the tougher problems of the Open (in which our fourth study this month was used in the 2018 event). If you want to try your skills at solving chess problems of all types, and studies, you can register for the event by e-mailing me. More details are at www.theproblemist.org in the Latest News tab. Other solving events will take place during this year's over-the-board British Chess Championships at Torquay, and at the Mind Sports Olympiad in London.

In the meantime, you can get some practice in by solving the problems in Christopher Jones' column as well as the four studies here. For the studies: you'll need to set up these positions on a board. In solving events, you are given a chess set and you can move the pieces to try and help you solve. You solve against the clock; for these studies give yourself an average of 25 minutes for each one, so 100 minutes in total. You write down your solutions and they are marked by the venue's supervisor. Points are awarded according to how much of the composer's solution you find, with five points available for each study if you find it all. In the answers, I'll show you where the points were awarded. You need to find the composer's main line; you can also write down sidelines if you're not sure what the main line is, but only the main line moves earn points. So look for the most artistic, elegant line.

The solutions are given on page 255.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS (See page 242)

(Mainly) for traditionalists...

This month's selection of originals has an old-fashioned feel that will I think commend it to readers who don't usually dabble in problems. (Well, apart from the helpmate maybe!) In Nikolay's 3-mover, Black is tied down, and has only one move, …b5, but we do have to find a way to inflict mate on move 3. In solving you may come to notice that if the queen abandons the defence of the f2 knight bad things could happen to the black king at f2, but it requires a leap of imagination to see that the way to solve this is 1.♖a8! b5 2.♕a1! ♔xf2 3.♕a7. Devotees will recognize the move of the white rook to a8, the only way to clear the path of the queen, as the time-honoured *Bristol* theme.

'Lion Cage'...

…is how Kurt describes the configuration of Pawns around the queen in our 4-mover. He has recently composed a number of problems featuring such cages (as regular readers of this column will be aware), from which, Houdini-like, the queen must emerge to deliver mate in the stipulated number of moves. As we shall see, there is a tenuous link with the first problem, as the queen will position herself on a line (in this case e5-a1) and there will then be a clearance of that line (though this time carried out by a reluctant Black). The key move, unusually for a problem, is a check (but the delicate touches in the ensuing play make up for any possible reservation about this being a 'strong' key), 1.♘c5. After the forced 1…bxc5 we play 2.e6 for 2…cxd4 3.♕e5 dxe3 4.♕a1. Successive Zugzwangs compel Black to enable White to achieve what he could not otherwise achieve in four moves.

A peripatetic bishop

In our 5-mover, Paul (a frequent BCM contributor, both of mate-in-n problems and of endgame studies) shows two nice variations featuring a highly mobile bishop. The key is 1.♗h4, threatening ♗f2. So try 1…♘e4. Now we have 2.♘b5+ ♔c4 3.♘b6+ ♔b4 4.♗e1+ ♘c3 5.♗xc3#. Or 1…h1♘, when play continues 2.♗e1 b1♘ 3.♗a5 e4 4.♗d8 and 5.♗f6. A nice round trip of the white bishop - in problemists' parlance, a *Rundlauf*.

An approachable helpmate

As you may recall, the idea of helpmates is such as to mean that in the case of Kabe's neat example we are looking for two collaborative BWBWBW sequences that end with Black in mate, once with the black rook at h8 and once with it instead at a8. This twinning gives a strong hint that the solutions will involve Black castling, and this does indeed prove to be the case - (a) 1.0-0 ♗e6+ 2.♔h8 ♗f7 3.♗h7 ♗e5 and (b) 1.♗f5 ♗a6 2.♗d7 ♗b5 3.0-0-0 ♗a6. The ♗>a6>b5>a6 manoeuvre seems to me (a jaded old helpmate hand) quite unusual and appealing.

SOLUTIONS TO ENDGAMES

(See page 252)

Isenegger

1.♘d7 (1 point) **♗b5 2.♔d8** (+1 point = 2) **♗xd7 3.♗c7+** (+1 point = 3) **♔c6 4.♗e5** (+1 = 4) **♔~ 5.♔xd7**(+1 = 5) wins.

Pogosyants/Garcia

1.♖bf1 (1 point) **g2 2.♘h6+** (+1/2 point = 1.5) **♔g3 3.♖1f3+** (+1/2 = 2) **♔h4 4.♖3f4+** (+1 = 3) **♔g3 5.♖g5+** (+1 = 4) **♖xg5 6.♖g4+** (+1/2 = 4.5) **♖xg4 7.♘f5** mate (+1/2 = 5). 1…♔h4 2.♖1f4+ ♖g4 3.♖f6 g2 4.♖h6+ ♔g3 5.♖f3 mate, or in this line 3…♖xf4 4.♔xf4 & 5.♖h6 mate. 1…♖g5 2.♖xg5+ ♔h4 3.♖f4 mate.

This was a version, by Mario Garcia, of Pogosyants' 1976 study.

Nilolajev

1.♘f3 d3 2.♗h6 (1 point) **♘d4+ 3.♘xd4 e1♕ 4.♗d2+** (+1 point = 2) **♔a6 5.♗xe1 d2 6.♘c2** (+1 = 3) **d1♕ 7.♘b4+ ♔a5 8.♘d3+** (+1 = 4) **♔a4 9.♘b2+** (+1 = 5) wins.

Gurgenidze

1.♖h8 (1 point) **♖d7+** (+1 point = 2) **2.♔xd7 ♗xb5+ 3.♔e7 ♗c4 4.g8♕** (+1 = 3) **♗xg8 5.♘xg8+ ♔g7 6.♘h6** (+1 = 4) **♔xh8 7.♔f8** (+1 = 5) g1♕ 8.♘f7 mate**.** Not 2.♘xd7? ♔xg7; nor 5.♖xg8? g1♕ 6.♖xg1 stalemate. There's also 5…♔g5 6.♘h6 and 5…♔h5 6.♘f6+ ♔h6 7.♔f7.

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